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BAPTIST COUNCILS IN AMERICA.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THEIR ORIGIN AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF
CHURCH HISTORY.

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CONTENTS.

Introduction, with Bibliography 5

CHAPTER I.—*Definition and Line of Approach* 9
Definition. The Jerusalem conference. The obligation of fellowship.

CHAPTER II.—*Early Principles of Fellowship among Baptist Churches* 13
(1) *In England.* Contact of American and English Baptists. Confessions of 1611, 1644, 1656, 1677, 1678, ("Orthodox Creed,") 1689.
(2) *In America.* Organization of the Kittery Church. Limited opportunities for inter-church fellowship before the Great Awakening. The Philadelphia Association.

CHAPTER III.—*The Entrance of the Council as a Recognized Institution in Baptist Polity* 27
The Middletown council of 1712. The Cape May Court House council of 1712. The ordination councils of the First Church, Boston, of 1718 and 1738. The Springfield council of 1740. The Boston installation council of 1764. The Warwick, R. I., (Boston 2nd) council of 1743. The New Light Movement. Associations as councils. Associations and the council. The Shaftsbury association "Answer" of 1791. Why did not the association absorb the council?

CHAPTER IV.—*The Status of the Council* 42
The council the product of fellowship. Not essential to the individual church. Its relation to the local church advisory. The broader sphere of the council as an institution. (1) The relation of the council to the churches at large. The competency of the council. Protection from packed councils. Conflict of councils. (2) The relation of the council to the church calling it. The acceptance of the advice of the council. The representation of the church in the council. The enlargement of the council. (3) The relation of the council to its constituent churches. Are they really represented? (4) The *ex parte* council. (5) Opposition to the council.

CHAPTER V.—*The Functions of the Council*..... 58
(1) In the constitution and recognition of churches. (2) In dissolution and disfellowship. (3) In ordination. (4) In installation and dismission. (5) In deposition and restoration. (6) Councils called in the interests of peace. (7) Promotion of local or general denominational activities and welfare.

CHAPTER VI.—*The Further Relation of Associations and Councils*..... 81
Associations continuing to act as councils. The problem of the relation of association and council. The Philadelphia plans of 1837 and 1841. The advisory committees.

CHAPTER VII.—*The Permanent Council*..... 96

CHAPTER VIII.—*Concluding Remarks*.....110

Appendix A. List of councils to 1820.
Appendix B. Councils for ordination of deacons.

INTRODUCTION WITH BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The study, of which the following pages are the result, was begun with the purpose of discovering the value of the council as a working instrument in the Baptist denomination. It was intended to limit it to the examination of as many individual councils as possible, classified according to the function which each council was called to perform, and then to the ascertainment of the actual results of each upon the various interests directly or indirectly involved.

The writer, however, soon found his interest gathering about the council as an institution, whose origin and development had apparently never been subjected to any thorough historical investigation. It is believed that the original purpose of the study has been even more adequately carried out than if there had been no change in its centre of interest; for the efficiency of the council has been an essential factor in its development as an institution. It is hoped, moreover, that as here presented, this study will be a contribution to a better understanding, on the part of earnest and conscientious people both within and without the Baptist churches, of the true spirit of our denominational fellowship.

The writer would here express his appreciation of their friendly assistance, in the work of research or in the preparation of the manuscript, to the several members of the Department of Church History in the University of Chicago; to Dr. J. Franklin Jameson; to Rev. W. C. Bitting, D. D.; to the numerous individuals who have contributed through correspondence or conversation; to personal friends who have extended their hospitality during researches in Ithaca, Hamilton, New York City, New Haven and Providence; also to the library staffs in the institutions mentioned below.

Use has been made of the following libraries and historical collections: Boston, Mass., Public Library, Congregational Library, New England Historic-Genealogical Society, Massachusetts Historical Society; Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University; Newton

Centre, Mass., Newton Theological Institution, Backus Historical Society; Worcester, Mass., American Antiquarian Society; Providence, R. I., John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, R. I. Historical Society; New Haven, Conn., Public Library, Yale University; New York City, Lenox Library, (also Records of the Southern New York Baptist Association and Records of the Permanent Council of New York City and Vicinity); Hamilton, N. Y., The Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Collection; Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University; Philadelphia, Pa., American Baptist Historical Society; Upland, Pa., Crozer Theological Seminary; Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago, Public Library, Newberry Library.

A wide use has been made of histories of towns and local churches, historical sermons and addresses, and Minutes of Associations. Specific references will be found in the foot-notes; in the case of material drawn from the Associational records, unless otherwise indicated, the information will be found in the Minutes of the appropriate year.

Although much of the data referred to is gleaned from The Watchman and its predecessors, practically the complete file from 1819 having been examined, the other denominational papers have been examined more than the relatively few references to them might indicate.

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CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION AND LINE OF APPROACH.

The term "council" has sometimes been loosely used of conferences more or less formal in nature, in which Christians, either as individuals or as representatives of churches or other organizations, have met for consultation and perhaps the formulation of some policy for Christian activity. In Baptist polity, however, the term has come to have a technical sense, viz., *an organized body, convened at the call of some local church and composed of representatives of the churches to which the call is issued, for the purpose of advising the convening church in regard to such matters as are stated in the call.* Such a definition is not to be applied too rigidly, for we must recognize that there may be certain modifications of the characteristics mentioned above, and yet the body may very properly be called a council. Sometimes, as in the constitution of a new church, the call for a council is issued by a body of Christians not yet possessing an ecclesiastical organization; again, a council may contain others than representatives specially appointed by the churches. Moreover, this definition which we have given applies rather to the somewhat stereotyped form of the present-day council than to the more plastic conditions of its early development. But the convening of a council, strictly so called, involves in every case, directly or indirectly, the relation of a local church to the other churches of the same faith and order. If there was only one Baptist Church, or if each Baptist church stood in absolute isolation from every other similar body, there could be no such institution as a Baptist council. In other words, the existence of the council as a universally recognized instrument in Baptist polity demands that it be adjusted to that much emphasized Baptist principle,—the independence of the local church. It is really from this point of view that we find special interest in our subject, as it is from its relation to the fundamental constitution of Baptist churches that the council becomes of prime importance. It would be possible to study it with an antiquarian's interest, attracted especially by such aspects of quaintness as are more or less common to all the ecclesiastical functions of the colonial period. Another possibility would be the treatment of the council as an approach to the history of the local church, just as a study of the foreign relations of a country through its conventions and

treaties will reveal much that is of moment in the domestic life of the people. If we possessed the questions which members of councils have put to candidates for ordination during the last two hundred years, we would have most valuable data for tracing the line of emphasis in theological thought among Baptists during that period. Here, however, we lack sufficient definite information from the sources, for the scanty nature of the official reports of councils, which rarely more than chronicle their organization and decisions, places a narrow limit upon the positive knowledge to be gained through such a process. Our purpose, however, is rather to trace the rise and development of the council as an institution and by the historical method to ascertain its constitutional basis. As the independency of the local church has been received as an axiom of Baptist polity, can there be, consistent with this, any such institution as the council? How has it come about that it holds the position it does to-day?

(1) It may not be superfluous to state that the Baptist council is in no way connected with that historic line beginning with Nicaea and continuing at intervals, sometimes of centuries, until the Vatican in 1870. Those councils were authoritative bodies with legislative powers,—sometimes judicial,—which were supposed to represent the church universal; to their decrees, every national and local church must yield full obedience. The whole status of the Baptist council, as we shall see, is fundamentally different in both its constitution and functions.

(2) The justification of the council in Baptist polity is often sought in the axiom of ecclesiastical practice,—that a New Testament precedent is a sufficient warrant for any institution. In Acts 15, we have the record of a council held in apostolic days; this is the model upon which Baptist councils have been formed, we are told, and all their actions should conform to this New Testament precedent. It should be evident to every one who reads the account of the conference at Jerusalem that it established no precedent for conciliar legislation authoritative over the churches, such as culminated through the series of councils in the decrees of Trent and the Vatican. A question involving most fundamental principles both in doctrine and practice had arisen in the church at Antioch. It seemed advisable for the church there to get as much light on the subject as possible, so they selected Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, to go up to Jerusalem, where they could consult with the apostles and the elders about the question. Whether the Epistle to the Galatians refers to this conference or not, it is certainly true that Paul did not go up to Jerusalem to receive authoritative instructions on a question which involved the very life of the Gospel which

had been directly revealed to him.[1] While the matter was probably discussed by the leaders in private,[2] it was finally brought before the whole church at Jerusalem. Their decision, though dignified by the title "decrees," was a decidedly neutral utterance and seems to have had little weight in the solution of the crucial question at issue.[3]

From both the occasion of this conference and the nature and results of its decision, if not the form, its advisory character is evident. May it not, then, be placed under Dr. Dexter's classification of "Councils called to give light"?[4] In one essential particular it fails to be a council. It bears no trace of separate organization apart from the church itself, being simply a meeting of the church of Jerusalem,—in which, indeed, the messengers from Antioch were allowed to participate. This fact,—its lack of separate organization,—is a sufficient reason for not considering the meeting in Jerusalem the prototype of the modern council. Moreover, there is to be found neither here nor in any other part of the New Testament the precedent for the submission to a council of the questions of the ordination of a candidate to the ministry or of the recognition of new churches, the most frequent occasions for the convening of councils to-day.

(3) Where, then, are we to look for the sources from which has sprung the Baptist council? It is generally conceded by American Baptists that the streams of local church polity of apostolic days gradually merged into the great hierarchical system dominated by the Bishops of Rome; but that from this highly developed and centralized absolutism they emerge again at the Protestant Reformation in the streams of Independency. To be sure, there were some obscure sects before the Reformation which kept alive the conception of the church as the local body of believers, who at least opposed the prevailing idea of catholicity; but persecution generally prevented the formation of any such local church organization as must precede the existence of formal inter-church relations. The question of the fellowship of the local churches could arise only after these had attained self-consciousness and a sense of permanence. For our purpose, therefore, it will be unnecessary to go back of the

[1]Gal. 1:11, 12.

[2]Acts 15:6. Cf. Gal. 2:2.

[3]The decrees, in view of Paul's acceptance of them, are merely the advice that Gentile Christians abstain from those things which would especially offend their Jewish brethren. If, however, one accepts the hypothesis that the decrees are a later product of the Jerusalem church, though they cannot be considered extremely Judaistic, they remain no longer neutral. Cf. McGiffert, "The Apostolic Age," p. 211 sq.

[4]"Congregationalism" p. 599.

emergence of Independency in the Reformation. It is immaterial, moreover, whether we look to Robert Browne as the first modern exponent of the independency of the local church or whether we look earlier among the Anabaptists. By the time the Baptists in America had held anything which could be termed a council, Independency had been on trial for several decades in the mother-country, and for its Scripturalness and practicality, such men as John Robinson and Oliver Cromwell and John Milton stood as sponsors. As opposed to the Episcopalian and Presbyterian theories of the status of the local church and its governmental functions, the development of Independency is closely united to the great democratic movement which overthrew the Stuart despotism and re-established the State on the basis of a constitutional monarchy subject to Parliament, safeguarding the liberties of the people by the Act of Toleration and the Bill of Rights. It would carry us too far afield to attempt even an outline sketch of that rapid rise of the people into power and responsibility which will ever make the seventeenth century a prominent stage in the progress of the race toward self-control and social efficiency. It must suffice to call attention to the fact that the institution, the somewhat obscure rise and development of which we are to study, is vitally connected with the process of political evolution in this period to which we have just referred. It would be absurd to claim that Baptist councils have influenced the development of popular government; but it may be confidently asserted that such an institution could only have come into being in connection with democratic ideas such as were in the seventeenth century moulding the political, social and ecclesiastical institutions of England and America.

The re-discovery of the local Christian church and its independence was not merely a triumph for individualism, nor did it lead in ecclesiastical polity to isolation. The fundamental principle in the constitution of the local church was the fellowship in Christ which drew Christians together to form the body of Christ. Inherent in this very principle was the obligation of Christian churches to manifest a similar fellowship among themselves. It is here, then, where the developing sense of fellowship is awakening that of obligation among the churches, that we may look for the sources of an institution which rests upon the obligations of fellowship. It is here that we find our starting-point and the line of approach to our subject.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY PRINCIPLES OF FELLOWSHIP AMONG BAPTIST CHURCHES.

1. In England.

Much has been written on the development of the polity of the Independents of England. How directly the Baptists were consciously influenced by their example is problematical; most likely each profited somewhat by the experiences of the other, each working out the same fundamental principles with not far different results. It is also uncertain how largely the ideas of the English Baptists were transferred to America. Is it possibly irrelevant, then, for us to consider even briefly the early principles of fellowship among the Baptist churches of England? Our purpose is not to show that the council as an institution was transferred bodily from England, for there is no evidence that this was the case. We wish to show merely that the Baptist churches of England of the seventeenth century plainly recognized alongside the principle of the independence of the local church in such matters as related solely to its own affairs the principle of interdependence as a necessary check upon any encroachment of the local church upon the rights of others. Whether we are right or not in asserting the recognition of this second principle must be judged by the evidence which we shall immediately adduce; meanwhile we find the relevancy of what at first may seem a digression in this fact,—that whatever ideas of church polity were generally accepted among English Baptists would not be unknown among their American brethren. In the first place, not a few of the early Baptists in America were adherents of that faith in England, and many of them members of Baptist churches there. The personal channels of communication between the two countries became of course more numerous in the eighteenth century; but in the previous fifty years, the few scattered Baptists could not have been wholly ignorant of the policy of fellowship among the English churches. John Clarke, the first pastor of the Newport, R. I., church, was a Baptist most likely before leaving for America; his pastorate of 32 years he interrupted with a sojourn of 12 years in England, (1652-1664), in the interests of the colony.[1] During this time, he must have become thoroughly acquainted with

[1] Newman, "Hist. of the Bap. Churches," pp. 108, 111.

the inter-relations of the Baptist churches there. Of more direct value to show that the early Baptists were not wholly ignorant of the faith and practices of their English brethren is the fact that at the organization of the church at Kittery, Maine, in September, 1682, when delegates from the Boston church were present, the Confession of Faith which the church adopted was that "put forth by the elders and brethren of the churches in London and the country in England dated in year 1682."[2] In this case, at least, we find that only a few months after the adoption of a confessional statement by the Baptists in the vicinity of London, a group of American Baptists make use of it as their declaration of faith, with the approval of the Boston delegates.

This particular creed of 1682 the writer has not found, but if it dealt with inter-church relations, it probably was not far different upon this point from the other Confessions of about the same date. We will now turn to some of the Declarations of Faith promulgated by the English Baptists during the seventeenth century to obtain what light we can on this phase of our subject.

It is only natural that what is perhaps the earliest statement of English Baptists, made in 1611, before they were in any position to proceed far in the positive work of the reconstruction of a church polity on the apostolic model, should go no farther than to assert the equality of the local churches. I refer to "A Declaration of Faith of English People, remaining at Amsterdam in Holland; Printed 1611," two of whose articles, (XIII. and XIV.), show that these "English People" were Baptists.

> "Wee Believe and Confess,—
>
> "XII. That as one congregation hath Christ, so hath all. And that the word of God cometh not from any one, neither to any one congregation in particular, but unto every particular *church,* as it doth unto all the world; And therefore no *church* ought to challenge any prerogative over any other."[3]

This statement strikes at the primacy of any particular church such as had been claimed and exercised by Rome. It denies the right of any church to claim a "prerogative" over another, but does not go so far as to assert absolute independence on the part of each local congregation. It leaves wide room for the obligation of local churches to each other; indeed, this principle is directly involved in the first sentence. Whatever rights the individual church may claim

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[2] Burrage, "Hist. of Bapts. in N. E.," p. 55.

[3] Crosby, "Hist. of the Eng. Baptists," Vol. II., App. I. Also in "Confessions of Faith," Publications of the Hanserd Knollys Society.

from its relation to Christ as its Head, it must also concede to every other church. This Article is in fact an application to church polity of the spirit of the Golden Rule; whatever oversight a church may exercise over others, it must be willing to receive in turn from them. There is nothing in this statement of an independence based upon a local church's possession of Christ to forbid a confederation of churches, if only the equality of each particular church is preserved. This "Declaration" of 1611, however, does not proceed so far in constructive polity, for these early Baptists were not yet confronted by any serious problems of inter-church relations.

In 1644, seven churches in London united in issuing "The Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists; * * * " Among its articles is to be found the following:—

> "XLVII. And although the particular Congregations be distinct and severall Bodies, every one as a compact and knit Citie in itselfe; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all meanes convenient to have the counsell and help one of another in all needfull affairs of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head."[4]

Here we have a positive advance beyond the Amsterdam Declaration of 1611, which was capable of broad interpretation because it was rather neutral in tone. Meanwhile, Baptists had not only increased in number, but they had begun to organize into churches. It was probably not till 1633 that the first Baptist church in London was formed by a group of anti-pedobaptists who withdrew from the Separate churches to which they had previously belonged. Eleven years later, there appear to be at least six other Baptist churches within the limits of London, a fact which necessarily raised the question of fraternal relations. These churches did not look upon the matter as one of indifference, for this Article reveals the distinct recognition of these primitive English Baptists of the mutual obligations of churches to one another. Thus early in the development

[4]Crosby, "Hist. of the Eng. Bapts.," Vol. I., App. II., gives what is apparently a 1646 edition of this same Confession under the title, "A Confession of Faith of seven Congregations of Christians in London, which are commonly, but unjustly called Anabaptists; . . . Printed at London, Anno 1646." Art XLVII. is as given in the text above save for a few unimportant verbal changes. So also Art. XLVI. of a 1652 edition under the title, "A Confession of Faith of the several Congregations or Churches of Christ in London which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists, etc." The 1644 edition is prefaced by an address "To All Christian Readers," and is "subscribed in the names of seven Churches in London." This is in the Colgate Historical Collection.

of their ecclesiastical organization they show by this united statement of their doctrines that they do not believe in isolation, and that other interests and principles of their common church life will hold in check any tendency in Independency to become predominatingly centrifugal and subversive of the true Christian idea of unity. There is here, however, no suggestion of any definite method by which the churches may "have the counsell and help of one another." That they are "all to walk by one and the same Rule," does not mean that all shall conform to one mode of procedure, but that they shall be guided by the Scriptures. These Baptists do not look upon a New Testament precedent as a *sine qua non* of inter-church counsel, which may be had "by all meanes convenient." The way is clearly left open for the development of any organization for effective fellowship, such as councils, associations, and missionary societies, though these particular institutions were probably not in the minds of those who issued this Confession of 1644.

The conception that the mutual relations of independent churches rest not upon the permissibility but upon the *obligation* of fellowship is still more explicitly stated in "A Confession of Faith of several congregations of Christ in the county of Somerset, and some churches in the counties near adjacent. Printed at London, Anno 1656."

> "XXVIII. That it is the duty of the members of Christ in the order of the gospel, though in several congregations and assemblies (being one in the head) if occasion be, to communicate each to other, in things spiritual, and things temporal."[5]

Already, however, the churches had been increasing in number and it had been found by experience that of churches it is true no less than of individuals, that "no one liveth to himself." There are some matters which in themselves pertain to the individual church, but which react, directly or indirectly, upon more than the local body immediately involved. The Baptist churches were becoming conscious, moreover, of their relations to the larger purpose for which they existed and recognized that if they were to become effective in the social order of their age, they must themselves find some method for the conservation of their mutual interests. A necessary step was the adoption of some concerted plan for the settlement of such differences as were already arising among the churches. The need of this was felt as early as 1677, when the chief amplification of the theory of inter-church relations was made in that line of

[5]Crosby, "English Baptists," Vol. I., App. III. Also in "Confessions of Faith." H. K. Society.

Confessions which starts in 1643-4 and leads through various recensions to the Philadelphia Confession of 1742.

"Chap. XXVI. Of the Church.[6]

"7. To each of these (local) churches * * * he hath given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe, with commands and rules, for the due and right exerting and executing of that power.

"15. In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of Doctrine, or Administration; wherein either the Churches in general are concerned, or any one Church in their peace, union, and edification, or any member or members, of any Church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many Churches holding communion together, do by their messengers meet to consider and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any Church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any Churches, or Persons: or to impose their determination on the Churches, or Officers."

We note here a distinct advance over the earlier statements, which expressed merely the general principles of fellowship. The first paragraph quoted reaffirms the immediate relation of the individual church to Christ, from whom it receives its power and authority. For these it is not dependent upon other churches or upon the Church universal. There is, however, the recognition of the following facts and principles:—

(1) There are matters of mutual concern among the churches.

(2) The churches are under the obligation of mutual oversight.

(3) Individual churches may err in their treatment of members.

(4) Churches may meet by their messengers to give advice in matters of difference. This is virtually the recognition of the council as an institution, the language suggesting that it is already the custom for such assemblies for counsel to be held.

(5) The council may review the censures of members of individual churches.

[6] "Confession of Faith put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country." 1677. In the Colgate Historical Collection.

(6) Yet its decisions are not to be imposed upon the church or churches, but reported to them by way of advice.

(7) The council has no "Church-power"; it is not the Church nor does it have authority over the churches or over their officers.

The rights of independency were not always so carefully guarded as in this line of Confessions at which we have been looking. In the so-called "Orthodox Creed," for example, dated 1678, we find set forth virtually the theory of a presbytery.[7]

> "XXXIX. Article. Of general Councils, or Assemblies.
>
> "General councils or assemblies, consisting of Bishops, Elders, and Brethren of the several churches of *Christ,* and being legally convened, and met together out of all the churches, and the churches appearing there by their representatives, make but one church, and have lawful right, and suffrage in this general meeting, or assembly, to act in the name of Christ; it being of divine authority, and is the best means under heaven to preserve unity, to prevent heresy, and superintendency among, or in any congregation whatsoever within its own limits, or jurisdiction. And to such a meeting or assembly, appeals ought to be made, in case any injustice be done, or heresy, and schism countenanced, in any particular congregation of Christ, and the decisive voice in such general assemblies is the major part, and such general assemblies have lawful power to hear, and determine, as also to excommunicate."

This is a very strong statement of conciliar authority in marked contrast to the Confession of 1677. That denied to any assembly of messengers of the churches any "Church-power," while this recognizes the messengers as representatives of the churches which are themselves considered as sitting together and forming one church of higher authority than the local church. To this appeals are to be made; its responsibility for the preservation of unity, the prevention of heresy and the exercise of superintendency would apparently be its sufficient warrant to take the initiative. Its decisions would be authoritative, and its jurisdiction extended even to the extreme of excommunication. The explanation of the presbyterian character of this "Orthodox Confession," which came from the General Bap-

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[7] "An Orthodox Creed, or A Protestant Confession of Faith, etc., etc., etc., being an Essay to unite and confirm all true Protestants in the Fundamental Articles of the Christian Religion, against the Errors and Heresies of Rome." Hanserd Knollys Society's Collection of Confessions of Faith.

tists, is to be found in the irenic purpose set forth in the sub-title of the Confession itself.[7] To quote the historian of the General Baptists, "The evident design of the compilers of these articles appears to have been to approximate as closely to the Calvinistic system as they could, without giving up their distinguishing tenets."[8] The significance of this Confession for our subject is two-fold; (1) it is probably the strongest statement by English Baptists of the mutual responsibilities of independent churches; (2) it endangers independency at certain points where American Baptists more carefully safeguarded it.

The "Orthodox Confession," however, is much less a guide to the actual theory of inter-church relations among the English Baptists than is the Confession of 1689, which comes in that long line already referred to as leading on this side of the ocean to the Philadelphia Confession. In the mother-country, this Confession of 1689 was considered representative. It was issued by a general assembly of delegates from more than a hundred congregations, "assembled together to consult of proper ways and means to advance the glory of God, and the well-being of the churches." The Assembly disclaimed "all manner of superiority, or superintendency over the churches," and all "authority or power to impose anything upon the faith or practice of any of the churches of Christ." Such being its attitude toward the question of inter-church relations, it found no need of making any changes on that subject in the statement of the Confession of 1677, which it inserted without any alteration.[9]

To turn briefly from the theory of their mutual relations, as attested in their Confessions, to the practice of the English Baptist churches, we find here also clear indications that they plainly recognized matters of common interest which could not safely be left to the sole decision of the local church. From the troublous times in which they were living, when to be known as a Baptist was to subject oneself to derision if not more perilous forms of persecution, the churches had little need of self-protection against deceivers within. The ultimate right of the local church to appoint its own minister could be exercised without reference to other churches. Thus as late as 1694, we have the case, cited by Ivimey,[10] of the

[8] Taylor, "Hist. of the General Baptists," Vol. 1, p. 360. An interesting statement of the ecclesiastical polity of the English General Baptist churches will be found in Robert Barclay's "Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth," pp. 354, 595. On page 352, he says: "These churches were *independent* churches co-operating in all matters connected with the ministry and the spread of the Gospel."

[9] "Confessions of Faith," H. K. Society.

[10] Joseph Ivimey, "A History of the English Baptists," Vol. 2, p. 174.

church at Kensworth, in Hertfordshire, which that year at its yearly meeting "proceeded not only to elect, but to charge one of their number to *break bread* and *administer* ordinances." The person so elected was then "set apart to the pastoral employment by themselves, without foreign aid or assistance." Yet there is already a denominational consciousness which demands that no church shall press its independency to the point of infringement upon the rights of others. For example, Ivimey, in speaking of an ordination in 1667, remarks, "It appears probable that when they could conveniently, they invited the Elders of other churches to assist at the service, and to recognize the union, as has been, and still is, the practice of our churches."[11] While the absence of such representatives would not, in the mind of the seventeenth century Baptists, invalidate an ordination, we find, as we follow the churches well into the next century and beyond, that there is the distinct recognition of the growing need of the protection of the ministerial office and some modification of the theoretic rights of the local church for the common weal. The similar process in America will receive our attention, so it will not be necessary to trace it further in England.[12] Our survey of the relation of the English Baptist churches to one another has been primarily to show what was likely to be the attitude of such English Baptists as came to America. Had they been nurtured in the mother-country in a fixed, rigid Independency, which subordinated all else to the absolute authority of the local church, doubtless they would have at once placed themselves in opposition to any institution which could in any way encroach upon that authority. Our study has shown us, however, that the principle of fellowship, with the obligations springing therefrom, was well recognized by the English Baptists, who upon coming to America would be willing to see the same principle embodied in the polity of the Baptist churches of the New World.

2. In America.

The first Baptist church in America was organized in Providence, R. I., in 1639. Next in order came the church in Newport, probably organized in 1644, without action, however, on the part of the Provi-

[11] Ibid. P. 194.

[12] The following quotation from the records of the church at Collier's Rents, Southwark (quoted in Baptist Annual Register, 1798) is typical of the eighteenth century practice. "Jan. 30, 1744. John Rogers . . . was set apart to the work and office of pastor, by the church, with fasting and prayer. Item. Agreed to invite the following ministers and messengers of churches to assist and behold our faith and order in the gospel, in the more public ratification of this day's work." Six ministers are named and two messengers from each of three churches.

dence church. To pass by the Baptists of Seekonk, (Rehoboth), whose separate organization is questionable, we find churches forming in the following order in New England:— Swansea, (organized in Wales in 1649), 1663; Boston, (Charlestown), 1665; Newbury, 1682; Kittery, Maine, 1682. The first two churches mentioned were organized independently, although according to Backus, John Miles, the pastor of the former, "often visited and labored with his brethren of Boston in the time of their sufferings." The Newbury church, however, was not wholly independent in its origin according to the records of the First Baptist Church of Boston, which read:—[13]

> "Agreed uppon at a church meeting that we the Church at Boston have assented unto the setleing of the church at Newberry."

The case of the Kittery church is of much greater interest and importance. In 1681, William Screven and Humphrey Churchwood of that place had been baptized and united with the Boston church, which soon after, at the request of several of its members resident in Kittery, granted Screven a license to preach. A few months later, in September, 1682, the Kittery Baptists forwarded to the Boston church the request that they be set off as a separate church. Messengers were sent and the organization of the Kittery Baptists was declared to be "A Church of Christ." This meeting of the messengers from Boston with the Kittery Baptists has been called a council, and if it was that, it was apparently the first Baptist council to be held in America. It is necessary for us to turn to the records of the Boston church, upon which we are dependent for our information.[14]

> "Upon serious & Solemn Consideration of the Church About A motion or Request made by severall members that lived att Kittery, yt they might become A Church & that they might p—ceed therein provided they were such as should be Approved for such A Foundacon work, the Church gave there grant and att ye time Appointed did send severall messengers to make yt strict Inquiry & Examinason as they ought in such A case who att there Returne brought ye Coppys here inserted 26th of 7mo 1682.
>
> "The Church of Christ att Boston yt is baptized upon profession of faith haveing taken into serious consideration ye Request of our Brethren att Kittery Relating to there being A Church by themselves yt soe they might

[13] Wood, N. E.—"Hist. of the First Bap. Ch. of Boston," p. 178.
[14] Wood, "Hist. of First Bap. Ch. of Boston," p. 180.

Injoy the precious ordinances of Christ which by re son of distance of habitason they butt seldome could injoy have therefore thought meet to make Choice of us whose names are undewritten as Messengers to Assist them in ye same and coming up to them we have found them A Competent Number and in ye same faith with us for upon carefull examination of them in matters of Doctrine & practise & soe finding one with us by there (we hope) Conshiencous Acknowledgmtt of ye Confession of faith putt forth by ye Elders & Brethren of ye Churches in London and ye Contry in England in ye year 1682.

"And they haveing given themselves up to ye lord & too one Another in A Solemn Covenant to walk as said Covenant may Express & alsoe haveing Chosen theire officers whome they with us have Appointed & ordained, we doe therefore in ye name of ye lord Jesus & by the Appointmtt of his Church deliver them to be A Church in ye faith and order of ye Gospel.

signed by us in ye name
of ye Church the 25 of 7mo 1682.

"ISAACK HULL
"THOMAS SKINNER
"PHILLIPP SQUIRE."

This record makes no specific mention of the organization of the meeting of the Boston messengers with the Kittery Baptists. It was evidently conducted with order and decorum, however, so the matter of formal organization is unimportant. A careful reading of our source of information will show several reasons why the meeting cannot be called strictly a council. To begin with, the matter is one within the Boston church itself, for the "Request" is made by some of its own members, and is made of that church only. The messengers were practically a committee of the church, with power to examine into the situation at Kittery and, if they should find this satisfactory, to act for the church which had already given its consent conditional upon the approval of this committee. This seems to be involved in the action of the church when it "gave there grant" and sent the "severall messengers to make yt strict Inquiry & Examinason," as well as in the action of the messengers who "doe * * * in ye name of ye lord Jesus & by the Appointmtt of his Church deliver them to be A Church of Christ." We have here simply a church setting off a part of its members as a separate church. The statement concerning the choice, appointment and ordination of the church officers is a little ambiguous as to the precise function of the Boston messengers in the proceedings. Prob-

ably no more is involved than their approval of the choice and their participation in the formal setting apart of the officers chosen.

The action of the Kittery Baptists is significant, however, as an indication of the spirit of fellowship. When the Boston church was organized, its constituent members came in part, at least, from churches in England, but it was not thought necessary for the approval of the home churches to be secured for the organization of a church three thousand miles away. It would have been possible for the Kittery Baptists to organize themselves into a church without reference to the church of which all or most of them were members. Yet they rightly felt that they were under obligations, which rested on the principles of fellowship, to receive the sanction of the Boston church in the constitution of a Baptist church in Kittery.

Up to about the time of the Great Awakening, 1740, there had been organized in New England not many more than twenty Baptist churches; aside from four in Connecticut and that in Kittery, which had early removed to South Carolina, they were about evenly divided between Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Information as to the early history of these churches is very meagre, and the present writer has been unable to find any evidence of any formal relation between them.

In 1732, when thirty members of the First Baptist Church of Swansea withdrew to form a church in Rehoboth, the elders and messengers of the former church were sent to assist in the installation of John Comer as pastor of the new church; but this case apparently falls into the same class with the instance at Kittery just referred to.[15]

Up to the time of the Great Awakening, the Baptists were relatively so insignificant in New England outside of Rhode Island that there would be little occasion for inter-church action among them. With the churches of the so-called "standing order" in Massachusetts and Connecticut, however, the question of inter-church relation was already one of pressing importance. Differing as the Baptists did from the Congregationalists both on the subjects and the mode of baptism, and also on the relation of the church and state, their principles of the relation of the local churches to one another were not fundamentally different. The Baptists were not wholly ignorant of the writings of such men as John Cotton and Increase Mather,[16]

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[15] Newman, "Hist. of the Baptist Churches," p. 198.

[16] Cf. Mather, "The First Principles of New England Concerning the Subject of Baptisme and Communion of Churches." Cambridge, 1675. In this he quotes (p. 28 sq.) from Cotton's "Book of the Keyes," ten Propositions bearing upon inter-church relations, including the function of councils.

who from their observation of the actual workings of Congregationalism in church polity were able to discuss the principles underlying inter-church relations. In his lecture on "Ecclesiastical Councils,"[17] Dr. Dexter refers to about twenty Congregational councils which were held in New England in the seventeenth century, and to at least ten more before the Great Awakening. As these councils were always of a *quasi* public nature, (Dexter citing two cases where the town itself called the council), the institution was not wholly unfamiliar to the Baptists of New England probably some decades before they had any occasion to introduce it among their own churches.

Before the Great Awakening, Baptist churches outside of New England were scarcely to be found in sufficiently close proximity to one another to raise the question of inter-church relations except in the vicinity of Philadelphia. There the church at Pennepek first demands our attention. Here was a group of Baptist families from Wales, with some others, who in 1688 organized themselves into a church, under the lead of Elias Keach. Although Keach had been baptized and ordained by Elder Dungan of the Cold Spring Church, that church apparently had no part in the organization or recognition of the new body. The familiar incident of Keach's early imposture and conversion must have taught the need of safeguarding the ministry.[18] The Pennepek Church became a centre of evangelistic effort, the result being many baptisms in the surrounding region. These converts continued for some time as members of the Pennepek Church, their spiritual interests being cared for through frequent preaching services in various convenient localities and by quarterly meetings held in rotation at Burlington, Cohansey, Chester and Philadelphia, at which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. This system delayed both the organization of separate churches and consequently questions of inter-church relations which otherwise would doubtless have arisen. Although the First Church in Philadelphia was formed in 1698, its independence from the Pennepek Church was not recognized in any formal way till 1746. Some churches had been formed in New Jersey, as at Middletown, 1688, Piscataqua, 1689, and Cohansey, 1691. The Welsh Tract church, which had been organized in Wales, "by the advice and counsel of the churches they came from,"[19] and had come over to Pennsylvania in a body in 1701, also should be mentioned. While these churches were in general quite active, there seem to have been at first no formal relations among them. The informal general or quarterly meetings, to

[17] "Congregationalism," Lecture X.
[18] Vedder, "Baptists in the Middle States," p. 59.
[19] Minutes of the Phil. Bap. Assoc., 1707-1807, p. 15.

which reference has been made, continued even after some of the local companies of Baptists hitherto connected with the Pennepek church had been organized into churches.

The first definite manifestation of formal fellowship among the Baptist churches of America was the organization of the Philadelphia Association in 1707. The original purposes of this epoch-making step in American Baptist polity, according to the statement in the records of the Pennepek church, were as follows:—[20]

(1) To consult about deficiencies in the churches and to set them in order.
(2) To protect the churches from unworthy members and ministers.
(3) To provide for the settlement of grievances between a church member and his church.

Whether a Constitution was adopted at this time is doubtful. The language of the Pennepek records does not safeguard the autonomy of the local church as did the Association itself later. To carry out the second purpose, it was agreed, (to use the language of the record),—

> "That a person that is a stranger, that has neither letter of recommendation, nor is known to be a person gifted, and of good conversation, shall not be admitted to preach, nor be entertained as a member in any of the baptized congregations in communion with each other."

It may be argued that the meeting had no authority to legislate for the churches, but as five of these appoint delegates in accordance with the plan adopted by the meeting, they probably also were guided by this "agreement" as to church members and preachers. The principle involved in the third purpose of the Association would have aroused intense opposition not much later. Here also it will be necessary to quote the language of the Pennepek record.[21]

> "It was also concluded, that if any difference shall happen between any member and the church he belongs unto, and they cannot agree, then the person so grieved

[20] Newman, "Hist. of the Bap. Churches," p. 211. The records of the Philadelphia Association begin with 1760; before that time, we are dependent chiefly upon "An Association Book, containing a Brief Account of the Beginning and Progress of the Churches . . . commonly called Baptists, in Pennsylvania and the Jerseys; now annually associating at Philadelphia; . . . Collected pursuant to an order of the Association, . . . 1749." This is to be found in the "Minutes of the Phil. Bap. Assoc., 1707-1807."

[21] Newman, p. 211.

> may, at the general meeting, appeal to the brethren of the several congregations, and with such as they shall nominate, to decide the difference; that the church and the person so grieved do fully acquiesce in their determination."

Here is distinctly stated the right of an aggrieved member of a local church to appeal to the Association, which itself or through a committee of its own appointment shall decide the case; the person so appealing thereby agrees to acquiesce in the verdict of this court of appeal, while the church, by its participation in the Association, has already assented to acquiescence, not in this case alone, but in all cases appealed by its members. Such an agreement shows either a high sense of the mutual obligations of churches to each other, or else an indifference to the principles of independency in the presence of practical benefits to be derived from greater centralization. The latter is more likely the true explanation of the situation. But in either case, the idea of the interdependence of the churches has somewhat suddenly crystallized into visible, tangible form,—into an institution, the Association.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENTRANCE OF THE COUNCIL AS A RECOGNIZED INSTITUTION IN BAPTIST POLITY.

Although the Philadelphia Association had as one of its specific functions the decision of any differences between aggrieved members and their church, when the first opportunity came for one of the churches to profit by this new court of appeal, strangely enough it did not do so, but adopted another method of deciding the case in controversy. We refer to an incident connected with the Baptist church of Middletown, N. J., to whose action in 1712 Morgan Edwards refers in his "Materials" as follows:—[1]

> "But in the year 1711, a variance arose in the church, in so much that one party excommunicated the other; and imposed silence on two gifted brothers that preached to them, viz., John Bray and John Okison. Wearied with their situation, they agreed to refer matters to a council congregated from neighbouring churches; the council met May 25, 1712; it consisted of rev. mess. Timothy Brooks of Cohansey; Abel Morgan and Joseph Wood, of Pennepek; and Elisha Thomas, of Welshtract, with six elders, viz., Nicholas Johnson, James James, Griffith Miles, Edward Church, William Bettridge, and John Manners. Their advice was
>
> "(1) 'To bury their proceedings in oblivion, and erase the records of them'; accordingly four leaves are torn out of the church book.
>
> "(2) 'To continue the silence imposed on John Bray and John Okison the preceding year'; one would think by this that those two brethren were the cause of the disturbance.
>
> "(3) 'To sign a covenant relative to their future conduct'; accordingly 42 did sign, and 26 refused; nevertheless most of the non-signers came in afterwards; but the first 42 were declared to be the church that should be owned by sister churches.

[1] Materials towards a History of the Baptists in Jersey." Phil. 1792. p. 14.

"(4) 'That rev. mess. Abel Morgan (seni.) and John Burrows should supply the pulpit till the next yearly meeting.

"(5) 'That the members should keep their places and not wander to other societies.' "

It is unfortunate that we do not possess a more detailed account of this, probably the first Baptist council, strictly so called, to be held in America. Why the case was not referred to the Association of which all the churches immediately concerned were constituent members, we do not know; we can only say that it was apparently not from any opposition to the Association itself. Of greater interest is the question as to how this church came to call a council at all to settle its internal troubles. As already stated, the Congregationalists of New England had adopted the council, and it had also some recognition in the polity of the English Baptist churches. As Middle Jersey contained many immigrants from New England and also from England and Wales, including "several able men, ministers and elders, * * * and some that had been ruling elders in the churches they came from—all of them men long concerned in the affairs of churches and associations in their own countries,"[2] we may assume that the Baptists of Philadelphia and vicinity were not wholly ignorant of the council. In this particular case at Middletown, it is very possible that it was thought wiser not to delay the settlement of the strife until the Association should meet. So the appeal was made directly to several of the churches to nominate some of their brethren who should consider the case and decide it, in the same way as would a committee appointed through the Philadelphia Association. If, as seems likely, the "yearly meeting" referred to in the fourth article of advice is that of the Association, which would be an opportune time to secure a permanent pulpit supply, there would be less likelihood that the council would be charged with intruding upon the sphere of the Association.

While there is nothing stated in the record about the formal organization of this council, it is referred to specifically as a council in Edwards' narrative; moreover, the definite manner in which the decision of the council is given, with its evident firm grasp of the situation, implies not only that it proceeded in an orderly manner, but that it considered itself as a distinct body in a sense that the delegates to Kittery in 1682 had not thought of themselves as distinct from the church at Boston which they represented.

The following month some Baptists at Cape May Court House, New Jersey, asked the Cohansey church to assist them in the organ-

[2] Quoted by Newman, "Hist. of the Bap. Churches," p. 212.

ization of a church at that place. In response to this invitation, the pastor, Rev. Timothy Brooks, who had participated in the council at Middletown, and two deacons were sent to advise with them and to assist in the constitution of the church. On June 24, 1712, the three messengers signed the following article:—[3]

> "In as much as you have covenanted together to walk in church fellowship according to Gospel institution; we do in the presence of God declare you to be a church of Jesus Christ; * * * We subscribe ourselves * * * on behalf of the Cohansey Church."

This is a little different from the Kittery case, for the Cape May Baptists do not appear to have been members of the Cohansey Church. Whether this can be properly classed as a council is a little uncertain, for these messengers may have considered themselves merely a committee of the Cohansey Church; yet their relation to the Cape May church is precisely that of a council, as is the work which they perform.

When the Philadelphia Association met this same year, (1712), there came before it the first case in which the machinery of the Association was used for the settlement of a difficulty within one of its constituent churches, in accordance with the original plan of its organization. The trouble centred about Thomas Selby, the pastor of the Philadelphia-Pennepek church, which was in a seriously distraught condition. The Association did not take the initiative, for the case was brought before it by application, though by which party the record does not state. A committee was then appointed by the Association from among its own members, to hear and determine the matter. Before proceeding, however, the committee secured the consent of both parties to their consideration of the case. After hearing the evidence, they brought in their decision, which was against Selby; they advised that he be "discharged from any further service in the work of the ministry," though also that he be paid in full.

The records of the Philadelphia Association for the next sixty years of its history are defective, but so far as they are preserved, they do not contain any other instance in these early formative years when the Association, either directly or through a committee, sat as a court of appeal upon a case of dissension within a church. In 1734, the Association advised the church at Great Valley to divide, but in case "they happen to jar or disagree, or any persons be dissatisfied, * * * that in such cases they shall call help from neighboring churches." There can be no doubt that this is a direct

[3] Hires, A. J., "Hist. Sketch of the 1st Cape May Bap. Church."

reference to a council as distinct from the Association, and from this time on, the rise and development of the council are to be traced both in its actual use as an institution for practical purposes in church polity and in the attempt of Associations to differentiate between their own legitimate functions and those which may be more wisely entrusted to a council of the churches.

We have already noticed the reason, lying in the small number of churches and their remoteness, in many cases, from one another, why there would be little occasion for councils among the Baptists before their rapid increase following the Great Awakening. In Massachusetts, however, where the churches of the standing order had already introduced the institution, being from the fact of their Establishment constrained to a formal orderliness, it was only natural that the most conspicuous Baptist church, that in Boston, should feel under a similar constraint that it might free itself from the charge of disorderliness which usually hangs over Dissent. Differing as they did from the Congregational churches of Boston on the doctrine of baptism, the Baptists yet desired to receive Christian recognition from those with whose other fundamental principles they were in general accord. So in 1718, when they had decided to set apart Elisha Callender, the son of their pastor, to the work of the ministry, they sent the following letter "to Dr Mather & Mr Webb to be communicated to their Churches."[4]

> "Honored & Beloved in the Lord
>
> "Considering that there ought to be a holy fellowship maintained among godly Christians and that it is a Duty for us to Receive one another as Christ also Receives us to the glory of god notwithstanding some Differing persuasions in matters of Doubtfull Disputations, and although we have not so great Latitude as to the Subject of Baptism as the Churches in New England generally have, notwithstanding as to fundamentall principles in your Doctrine of Christ both as to the faith & order of the Gospell, we Concur with them being also satisfied that particular Churches have power from Christ to Choose their own Pastors & that Elders ought to be ordained in Every Church & haveing Chosen our well beloved Brother Elisha Callender to be our pastor we Intreat you to send your Elders & Messengers to give us the Right hand of fellowship in his ordination.
>
> "In ye name of ye Church."

[4] Wood, Hist. of First Bap. Ch., Boston, p. 201.

This invitation was accepted by the two churches, which sent their pastors and messengers to assist in the ordination. To be sure, here also we lack definite information as to what took place, especially as to whether there was any preliminary examination of the candidate by these delegates, or if there was only the public service. If the latter was the case, this can hardly be called a council. As only Congregational churches were invited, there is some doubt as to whether the matter of the ordination of Callender would be submitted to them; they were invited to give the Baptists "the Right hand of fellowship in his ordination."

Twenty years later, upon the death of Mr. Callender, the church chose Jeremiah Condy as its pastor and invited the Cambridge and two Boston churches,—these three being Congregational,—and the Newport Baptist church to send their pastors and messengers to assist in his ordination. The letter addressed to the Cambridge church which is preserved in the records of the Boston church, is probably the earliest extant copy of a formal letter missive sent by an American Baptist church asking for a council, and so is entitled to a place here.[5]

> "Boston January 24, 1738. To the Church of Christ in Cambridge under the pastoral care of Revd Mr Nathanael Appleton.
>
> "Hond & beloved in the Lord.
>
> "The Church of Christ in Boston lately under the care of the Revd Mr Elisha Callender deceased, having unanimously made choice of Mr Jeremiah Condy to take upon him the pastoral charge of this Church, of which Mr Condy has declared his acceptance,—This is therefore. Hond & beloved Brn to request of you to send your Revd Elder & Messengers to assist at ye ordination of our Said Elected Pastor on the Second Wednesday in February next— A request of the like tenoar with this we have made to the Churches in Boston under ye care of ye Revd Messrs Welsted & Gray, and Mr Wm Hooper & to ye Church in Newport under ye care of the Revd Mr John Callender, Hond & Beloved. We heartily wish you all spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus the glori-

[5] Wood, Hist. of First Bap. Ch., Boston, p. 234.

ous head of the Church. We are in behalf and by order of the Church your affectionate Brethren in the Gospel

"SHEM DROWNE DEACON,
"JOHN CALLENDER,
"JAMES BOUND,
"BENJ LANDON,
"JOHN PROCTOR."

There is a noticeable difference in tone between this letter and the letter sent in 1718, which was somewhat halting and apologetic, chiefly because it was uncertain what reception it would have from the two churches to which, through their pastors, it was addressed. The earlier letter, moreover, is not so formal as is the later one, which is expressed more in the phraseology of the letter missive technically so called. The messengers, except Mr. Welsted, who was sick at the time, came together on February 14, 1738, and organized by choosing Rev. Mr. Appleton as Moderator. This was "at the house of Brother Skinner Russell," where they "having agreed upon the public proceedings of the day adjourned to the meeting-house, when the ordination was carried out." Here we have an organized council, though we do not have the definite information that they subjected Mr. Condy to any preliminary examination; the record only informs us that they "agreed upon the public proceedings of the day"; that is, they arranged the public service, in which Mr. Gray began with prayer, Mr. Callender preached the sermon, Mr. Appleton gave the charge and Mr. Hooper the right hand of fellowship.[6]

In 1727, a Baptist movement had started in Springfield, Mass. About thirty of the people who were interested signed a formal letter which they sent to the Boston church, of which some of them were members, asking that the pastor, Mr. Callender, be sent to advise and instruct them. The invitation met with a hearty response, the pastor and three brethren being sent at the expense of the church, while any other brethren of the church who might attend were also authorized to appear "in the name of ye Church." As a result of this visit, eleven persons were baptized on July 23, and during another visit, in September of the next year, six more were baptized. These all were considered members of the Boston church. In 1740, the Springfield Baptists wrote to the Boston church asking that they might be organized as a separate church, and that the pastor and messengers might be sent to assist them in the ordination of Edward Upham, whom they had unanimously chosen as their pastor.

[6] Wood, p. 235.

The Baptist churches in Rehoboth, Mass., New London, Conn., and Newport, R. I., were also asked to meet in the council, but no Congregational church was invited. This, then, would appear to be the first strictly Baptist council to be held in New England. Apparently the Rehoboth and New London churches did not send delegates. The proceedings of the council as preserved in the records of the Boston church were as follows:—[7]

> "Springfield Oct 14. 1740 at the house of Mr Lamberton Cooper the Church of Boston and the Church of Newport under the pastoral care of Mr John Callender, being met by their Elders and messengers, and formed into a Council, of which Mr John Callender was chosen moderator, after Solemn prayer for the divine blessing on the important affair going to be transacted, the request of the Brethren of the Baptist denomination resident in and about Springfield to the church in Boston requesting their dismission for ye end aforesaid was read, and an attested Copy of the Vote of the church in Boston requesting yr dismission was produced—upon which the following persons appeared and Signified their desire to be dismissed for ye purpose above mentioned, namely," (Here follow fifteen names.).

The public services of recognition were held the following day, when, also, Mr. Upham was ordained as pastor of the Springfield church.

The First Church of Boston called its third council in December, 1764, when letters were sent to three of the four Congregational churches of that city requesting that they send their "Revd Elders & such other Delegates" as they should think proper to sit in council concerning the installation of the Rev. Samuel Stillman as pastor of the church.[8] No Baptist churches were invited, probably in part because the First Church had been at odds with many of the other Baptist churches of New England. Naturally the Second Baptist Church, although located less than a block away, was not invited to send delegates, for a two-fold reason. In the first place Mr. Stillman was called away from the Second Church where he had been associate pastor. Moreover, the Second Church had split off from the First in 1743, being originally composed of members of the latter church who had accused the pastor, Mr. Condy, of preaching Arminian doctrines. After being suspended from communion, they had organized themselves as an independent church. They did not

[7] Wood, p. 239.

[8] A copy of the letter will be found in Wood, p. 248.

seek immediate recognition by the First or other Baptist churches, but when, two months later, they selected one of their number, Ephraim Bound, as their pastor, they desired to have the assistance of other Baptist churches. As they wished to make sure of a soundly Calvinistic council, it was

> "unanimously agreed that Elder Wightman of Groton in Connecticut, Elder Green of Leicester, and Elder Moulton of Brimfield, be sent or wrote to, to assist with their respective messengers at the time and place aforesaid. (Greenwich, R. I., the first Wednesday in September.) N. B. The said Elders Wightman, Green and Moulton, we apprehend to be sound, clear, and zealously affected to the doctrines of free and sovereign grace, and absolutely averse to the Pelagian and Arminian tenets."[9]

Greenwich, Rhode Island, was selected as the place of meeting instead of Boston, on account of Elder Wightman, who was advanced in years; but the council was finally held at Warwick, Rhode Island. The language of the record shows that not only the ministers, but messengers of their churches were invited to attend upon the ordination.

The New Light movement, arising from the Great Awakening, was disturbing not only to the churches of the standing order in New England, but to the Baptist churches as well, although on the whole, the Baptist cause profited greatly by it. In 1750, an Elder Sprague had gone to Exeter, R. I., where he had organized a Baptist church, most of its members being favorable to the New Light ideas. On May 23, 1753, representatives of some twenty-five New Light churches met with the Exeter church to consider the terms of fellowship and communion,—a second similar council being held at the same place the following year.[10] These gatherings perhaps belong more properly to the history of Congregational councils; but as the Exeter church was avowedly a Baptist church, and some of the other New Light churches were composed of both Baptists and Pedobaptists, and moveover as Elder Sprague himself, a staunch

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[9] Church Record, quoted in "Hist. of the Second Baptist Church," in Christian Watchman, April 15, 1836.

[10] The council of 1753 appointed Elder Sprague and three other Elders to go to Middleborough, Mass., to sit in council with the New Light church there, of which Isaac Backus was pastor and which was in a disturbed condition over the question of baptism. In 1756, Backus organized a Baptized Church at Middleborough and from that time is an important factor in the denominational life. The history of the Exeter church is to be found in the Narragansett Historical Register, Vol. 2, p. 3 sq.

Baptist, was active in both meetings, they may be mentioned as showing a point of contact between the two denominations in the development of the council. The decisions of the two councils were favorable to open communion, with which the Exeter church concurred. Mr. Sprague, however, was a believer in restricted communion, and so found himself out of harmony with his flock. In 1757 he had withdrawn from fellowship with the church, although the pastoral relation had not been formally severed. A council met in July of that year,—presumably of New Light churches,—and another one in November, which advised the church to withdraw from its pastor, which it did. The Exeter church, during this period, was in closer relation to the New Light Congregationalists than it was to the Baptists, but later it adopted restricted communion.

While we might continue to trace the individual councils which were held with increasing frequency as the churches grew in number and their fraternal relations became closer, we have perhaps followed sufficiently far the process of the introduction of the council as an institution to meet in a practical way certain situations in which some of the local churches found themselves. These councils at which we have been looking were called by the churches, not in accord with any well-defined precedents of denominational usage, for they did not have these for their guidance, but as practical agencies for securing what they wished to accomplish through them. As has already been suggested, some of the Baptists may have been cognizant of the customs of the English Baptists; more probably, the American Baptists simply profited by the experiences of the Congregational churches, which, earlier than themselves, were forced to meet the problems of inter-church relations.

With the organization of the Philadelphia Association, there came the opportunity for the Baptists to develop more rapidly a consistent system of church polity, and this opportunity was enlarged as other associations were formed. Of these, the Warren Association was next to its prototype in importance. This was partly because of the general influence of New England. More specifically, the Baptist leaders in New England, who guided the Warren Association between many a Scylla and Charybdis as new problems of great moment confronted the churches, were men of strong intellect, whose opinions were respected and their counsels potent whereso-ever they reached. We will now turn to some of these Associations to see what evidence there is in their actions of what we may call the denominational recognition of the council as a legitimate part of Baptist polity.

It was very natural that the churches should find in the annual meetings of the Associations an opportunity for obtaining informa-

tion and advice on various matters both of doctrine and polity as questions concerning these arose in the early churches. We have already noted that in 1734, the Philadelphia Association had suggested the advisability of holding a council in case of dissension in a local church. It became the custom for churches to address "Queries" to their Association, which, after discussion and possible reference to a committee for more careful deliberation, were answered, both "Query" and "Answer" often appearing in the records of the Association. Although the decisions of the Associations were considered as advisory only, yet they were recognized as the thoughtful and deliberate opinion of representative Baptists, and so were of great influence in shaping the denominational traditions. Sometimes the matter suggested by a "Query" was of sufficient importance to become the topic for the "Circular Letter" which it was the custom for many of the Associations to address each year to their constituent churches.

In the first half-century of the history of the Philadelphia Association, it frequently performed functions which to-day are more regularly exercised by councils. In 1745, for example, at the request of the church at Bethlehem, two of the "reverend brethren" of the Association were sent to that town to assist at the ordination of a minister. A few days later, they were "to be at Cranberry, in order to settle the members there in church order." In 1752, the church at Opocken, Virginia, applied to the Philadelphia Association for assistance, "some difficulty subsisting between the church and their minister." Four years later, John Davis was ordained at the meeting of the Association, which acted virtually as a council. In 1781, after a council of ministers had decided a controversy between the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia and its minister, Rev. Elhanan Winchester, against the latter, the case was carried to the Association, which appointed a committee to consider it. This committee made its report, confirming the earlier decision of the council of ministers, to the Association, which unanimously approved it. This mode of procedure on the part of the Association is interesting, as it was practically a return to the method adopted in the original plan of its organization in 1707.

In the South, too, the Baptists made use of the Association both for advice and for denominational recognition and approval. Thus in 1787, the Fishing Creek Church wrote to the Georgia Association "as to an advisory council,"—to quote the language of the letter. This phrase implies that the Georgia Baptists already looked upon the council as a recognized institution. The previous year, this Association had answered queries submitted to it as to the power of the churches to ordain and to silence ministers, and at later sessions,

it frequently expressed its opinion on matters of polity. Similar questions are to be found in the records of the Charleston and other southern Associations, to some of which it will be necessary later to refer.

In New England, as already stated, the organization of the Warren Association in 1767 was an important step in the development of Baptist polity, for this Association not only from time to time expressed opinion as to what was "regular" in church practice, but also itself established precedents. While in many matters it could profit by the experiences of the Congregational churches, in many others it must be a pioneer and work out its own ecclesiastical principles and the methods of applying them. In 1776, the Association found itself confronted by a situation peculiarly difficult. The "brethren from Attleboro objected against sitting with those from Bellingham, because of a breach that had taken place betwixt those churches." A council had already been held in regard to the controversy; of that council we know only that it failed to secure a reconciliation. For the Association to ignore the controversy which the Attleboro brethren had thus brought to its attention would be virtually to decide against them; while to hear the case would apparently transform the Association into a court of appeal, a danger to the independency of the local church which some of the opponents of the Association thought constantly imminent. The action of the Association was eminently wise and conservative. After careful deliberation, having secured the consent of the parties concerned, a committee was appointed to hear the case at Wrentham,—a town lying between Attleboro and Bellingham,—to "do their utmost to settle the controversy between these churches; and to make report of the effects of their labours" at the next annual meeting of the Association. This action was similar in principle to the primitive method of the Philadelphia Association. The Warren Association, however, did not wish its action to be interpreted as in any sense hostile to the council as now a more regular agent in the reconciliation of churches which were in controversy. So the members of the council which had previously heard the case were invited to attend the new hearing. In 1777, the committee was able to report to the Association the success of their efforts, by which a satisfactory settlement of the trouble between the two churches was reached.

We have selected this incident not as an isolated case, but because it is a typical illustration of the attitude of the Associations toward the council. We have already noted several instances where an Association exercised the functions which to-day would belong to a council. As the churches were constantly turning to their Associations for advice concerning questions of polity, and it is

supposed to be the natural tendency of institutions to arrogate to themselves as much power and influence as possible, why did not the Association crowd out the council as superfluous? The answer is partly involved in the broader problem of the self-limitation in general of the Association which is outside our immediate subject. We can, however, point out a few instances of Associational action which illustrate the fact that the Association was never consciously hostile to the council, but on the contrary, sought to establish it more generally among the churches and make its place in Baptist polity more secure.

In 1756, the Charleston Association of South Carolina had answered a Query concerning the finality of the decision of a majority in a church by asserting,

> "No church or majority of a church has power to bind the conscience; If therefore the majority should introduce errors subversive of the peace of the church, and wound the consciences of the brethren, the minority may, after all proper methods to reclaim the rest by calm reasoning, by calling in the assistance of the other churches, and by referring the matter to the Association, should these prove ineffectual, be received as the church, and the majority disowned."[11]

This language is a little ambiguous; the phrase "should these prove ineffectual" may go with the preceding clause, which would make this a recognition of the Association as a court of appeal after the failure of a council to effect a reconciliation. More probably it is to be connected with the phrase, "may be received;" that is, the reference is to three possible modes of procedure open to an aggrieved minority,—to convince the majority "by calm reasoning" that the minority are in the right; or, failing in that, to carry the case to a council or to the Association. By either interpretation of the phrase, however, it is evident that the council was looked upon by the Charleston Association as early as 1756 as the first and proper agency for the settlement of any difficulty within a church which the latter was unable itself to adjust satisfactorily.[12]

In 1772, when the First Baptist Church of New York objected to the admission of the Second Church into the Philadelphia Association "on account of difficulties subsisting between the two churches," "they were advised to call the aid of some sister churches to assist

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[11] Furman Wood, "A Hist. of the Charleston Assoc.," p. 36.

[12] The Attleborough-Bellingham case referred to on page 37 would be in principle an illustration under the first interpretation given above, although the trouble there was not internal but one between two churches.

in settling them. Accordingly they chose our brethren" (five named) * * * "who are to meet * * * to attend on that business." Here the principle of the council is endorsed, but the form is more that of a committee of the Association. The next year, when nothing had come of this action, the Association referred the case to a committee of three, apparently with full power to receive the Second Church into the Association.

The Warren Association, in 1782, in response to a request from the church at Harwich for

> "advice as to the best mode of proceeding in case any Church should deviate from the faith and order of the gospel as held by these Churches:
>
> Voted, We are of the opinion, that in such cases the neighboring Churches ought to inform the deviating Church of their uneasiness, and desire a candid hearing; if this is denied, or if it be granted, and satisfaction is not obtained, they should withdraw fellowship from said Church, and give information to the next Association, who have a right to drop such Church from this body; though we disclaim all power and jurisdiction over the Churches."

Here again we see the principle of the council endorsed by the Association, though it asserts its own right to drop a church from membership, as it possessed the sole right to admit to membership. That same year,

> "A letter was presented by Elder Barstow, in respect to the difficulties subsisting between him and the Church at Sutton. Voted, That we conceive it is entirely inconsistent with the original design of this Association to interfere in any such matters."

It was found, however, that the Association could not prevent itself from being involved in such cases, so we read in the Minutes of 1785,

> "As difficulties in the church at Sutton brought on long discussions, without a possibility of doing anything to settle them; Voted, That those brethren of the church, formerly acknowledged a member of this Association, here present, do not set as members of this body, nor anything be done relative to the result of the councils which they have had on said difficulties; and that this Association advise both the contending parties to unite in a mutual council before our next yearly meeting."

In 1788, this Association took action touching three of the churches belonging to it. The messengers from the Church at Woodstock were

> "requested to omit taking a seat at this meeting, in hopes that before another annual association their difficulties will be settled."

Two other churches were dropped from the Association, in one case the latter finding the warrant for its action "from information by a late council of churches and other good evidence." In general, the Association has distinguished between the dissolution of the membership of a church in the Association and the disfellowship of a church by sister churches, the latter action being secured normally through a council. While practically the vote of an Association to drop a church may be considered by the other churches as denominational disfellowship, theoretically the relation of the expelled church to other churches is not disturbed, as membership in an Association is a purely voluntary relation.

From the way in which the council came into Baptist polity, it is evident that no definite date can be assigned as the time when it became a fully recognized institution. In an appendix there will be found a list of such councils before 1821 as have come to the writer's attention, and that incomplete list will suggest that long before the end of the eighteenth century, the council had been adopted and developed as a regular organ of ecclesiastical life. While much of the earlier direct evidence already adduced shows clearly that almost from the first need of such an institution the council offered itself as a convenient instrument and was adjusting itself into its proper sphere, it is from indirect evidence that we are most assured that this was the case. To present only one out of numerous illustrations, here is one from the Shaftsbury Association Minutes of 1791.

> "Query from the church in Ashfield: When any matter of difficulty has been fairly discussed by a council from any sister churches, has any neighboring church a legal right to demand a hearing of said difficulty? provided those justified by the result of a council do not request it, and the party judged to be in the wrong refuse to join in council?"

The significance of this does not lie in the negative answer which the Association gave to the query, though that implies the right of the council in such a case to due respect on the part of a neighboring church; but in the assumption of a relatively obscure rural church as early as 1791, that the council is the regular agency for the settle-

ment of difficulties in a Baptist church which the church itself seems unable to settle in a way satisfactory to its own members and the sister churches which may be indirectly involved in the case. This shows that by this time, the council had become a well-recognized institution among Baptists.

In treating the status and, more particularly, the functions of the council, we shall introduce considerable material which would be pertinent to the present chapter. It will be sufficient here to say merely that as the Associational organization became more systematized and the principles of ecclesiastical polity were more carefully and consciously wrought out in the constitutions and practices of the Associations, we find that while the latter were ever ready to serve the best interests of the churches, occasionally taking action which under peculiar circumstances seemed expedient though objectionable as a precedent, they show, as is evident from what we have already seen, a remarkable self-restraint in their relation to the council. The early interchange of the functions of the two institutions makes the problem of their differentiation complicated; *a priori,* one would suppose that the Association as more highly organized, would have sidetracked the council and assumed its functions. The reason for the preservation of the council alongside the Association is probably to be found in the fear lest the Association should become too dominant and be transformed into a consociation or synod, with legislative and administrative authority over the individual churches. By referring to councils those matters which were more directly related to the churches at large,—as the ordination and disfellowship of ministers, and other matters which involved the denominational standing of ministers and churches, a check was placed upon any tendency in the Association toward presbyterianism. Yet the Association still offered itself as a regular opportunity for any local church to secure advice from its sister churches, so the records of the Associations continue to be an important source of information for the student of the council as a denominational institution. It is unnecessary, however, for us to use further in this connection the material thus offered, for it simply corroborates the fact already shown, that by the time the Baptist churches are sufficiently numerous to feel seriously the need of the assistance and protection of such an institution, it has already found a place in their denominational polity; though we shall see, as we trace its further development, that the distinction between the functions of the Association and those of the council was not yet determined.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STATUS OF THE COUNCIL.

In the preceding chapter we have traced the gradual entrance of the council into denominational recognition, or we might say, the emergence of the council as an institution through the application of the principles of fellowship to the varied conditions in which the churches found themselves. From the nature of its origin, the council is not a static thing and, as we shall see, it has always shown its vitality by its ability to develop and to adjust itself to meet new conditions. So when we speak of the status of the council, we must recognize that in some particulars this will vary with the growth and the changed relations of the churches. Yet there are some principles which have always been adhered to.

In the first place, the council has ever been regarded as the servant, not the master of the churches. As we have traced its introduction into Baptist polity, we have seen that it was not imposed upon the churches from without, but was called into service by themselves to perform functions which the churches found necessary for their own best welfare. It was not self-creative, but the product of the growing fellowship among the churches. Its purpose was utilitarian, not ecclesiastical. It sprang into being from the needs of the churches, independent, yet constrained by the bonds of fellowship, and *not from the impulse of the denomination to organize itself for corporate expression.*

Another principle is very evident from the nature of the origin of Baptist councils. In no sense are they *essential* to the existence of a true church or ministry. The churches antedate the council which was called into being by them. The local church is independent and possesses through its union with Christ, without reference to other bodies of Christians, a self-sufficiency to live its own ecclesiastical life, choose its own ministry, administer the ordinances and exercise discipline over its own membership. This has ever been regarded a most fundamental principle of Baptist polity.

A third principle follows from these,—namely, that in its relation to the local church, the council is advisory only. The council exists, we are told in the church manuals, solely for the purpose of giving advice, with no authority to enforce its own decisions. The Warren

Association in 1792 shows the opinion of the Baptists in its constituency in this item from its Minutes:

> "A Quere. Whether the judgment or result of an ecclesiastical council, is more than advisory? Answered unanimously in the negative."

The previous year, the principle was set forth very lucidly in the circular letter of the Shaftsbury Association, (lying partly in Vermont), which gives a very concrete reason why a church cannot be compelled to follow the advice which a council may give. Though the letter is speaking specifically of the Association, it is the Association in its capacity as an advisory council, so the principle involved is the same; likewise, it applies more broadly than to cases of discipline merely, though these are specially referred to.

> "Finally, brethren, we consider ourselves to have *no power as an association* to determine any cases of discipline in the churches. But we are only *to give our advice* and *opinion* in those points, and intelligence in such matters as come within the limits of a free Christian conference." * * *
>
> "We are sensible that some may object to this, and say, that the church is imperfect and liable to make wrong judgment. True,—but if we admit of *decisive councils,* to whose judgment the church *must submit,*—if *their* judgment is in opposition to the church, and the church is not convinced that they were wrong,—they cannot restore the member rejected, without counteracting their own judgments; and if they do it upon the judgment of others, still they can have no more fellowship with such a person than before. It appears hence, that *decisive councils* immediately militate against real fellowship and gospel union in the churches. But councils, *for advice only,* in difficult cases, are useful. In this way, the churches and brethren may gain light, and all their difficulties be happily settled."

Now while this principle is attested historically and as a theory is maintained consistently as regards the relation of the individual council to the specific case which has been submitted to it for advice, the council as an institution, in its relation to the Baptist denomination,—or if any one prefers, in its relation to the fellowship of Baptist churches,—has occupied a position both theoretically and historically which cannot be adequately described merely as "advisory." We are interested in a larger phase of the institution. What is the status of this "advisory" council? From the standpoint of the local

church most directly interested in the council and looking only at the specific decision which the council reaches, it is true that the advice of that particular council carries only so much weight as there is sound reason in it, and the local church will doubtless govern itself accordingly. Yet in the decision of a council, unless the integrity of the latter is under suspicion, there is a momentum in its impact upon the consciousness of the denomination and of the local church as well that is not fully represented by the mere soundness of the advice itself. There is another factor involved. The advice is the advice *of a council,* not that of an irresponsible group of men.

The distinction just made is important to be borne in mind as we continue our study of the subject, and especially because it involves a different object of study from that which has presented itself to most previous writers on this topic. The church manuals have been chiefly interested in showing the relation of the local independent church to the specific council which it might call, while our concern is rather with the institution as such. For that reason, as we consider the status of the council, we turn first, after these preliminary remarks, to the relation of the council to the churches at large; then we will consider its relation to the church or churches calling it, and finally its relation to its immediate constituency.

I. THE RELATION OF THE COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES AT LARGE.

This rests upon no claim of the council itself to represent the outside churches, but rather upon the confidence of the churches not represented that those which are, will act judiciously and in every way so as to retain the respect of the churches at large. If the origin of the council had been different from what it was, especially if it had come into being from the assertion of the neighboring or the larger churches of the right to decide the controversies within the local church or to determine the standing of churches or ministers, the council would have had the opposition not only of the local church but of the whole denomination as well. In other words, the council would never have found a place among American Baptists. But the council has always, when called in sincerity, been given its tasks as a sacred trust, in which the interests of the larger fellowship were involved no less really than were those of the local church most directly concerned. By general consent, except for some sporadic opposition, it became the settled polity among Baptist churches, in the gradual way which we have been tracing, that the matters which specially involved the principle of fellowship, though they indeed in the last analysis belonged to the local church, were to be, not withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the local church, but first submitted to the advice of sister churches in council, who would be considered

competent to act in behalf of the larger sisterhood. The concrete illustrations of cases thus referred will occupy our attention in the next chapter, while in the preceding one, the general nature of the relationship of the council to the churches at large has been at least indirectly indicated, so that little besides the brief summary statement just made is necessary. The aspects of the relationship which may need a little further elucidation may be adequately brought out as we consider briefly two or three practical problems which may seem naturally to arise from the lack of any close and formal connection between the council and the denomination at large, and which as a matter of fact have arisen in the historical development of the institution.

First, what churches may be considered competent to act for the denomination so as properly to conserve its interests, which might suffer at the hands of an irresponsible independent church? The answer to this question is, as made by the council in history, that in general a fair number of the churches in the immediate vicinity may safely be entrusted with the consideration of the more ordinary affairs which are submitted to a council. The tendency to follow the associational lines as the normal limits for the composition of a council will come to our attention again later; the extension of the invitation to the neighboring churches to sit in the council has generally been considered sufficient. It has sometimes been the case that the neighboring churches are directly or indirectly involved in some case of controversy within a local church. Under such circumstances, a council has better standing before the denomination if its membership includes a wider range of churches and the geographical basis of selection has been abandoned altogether. This will generally be the case if some churches of wide prominence or even individuals who are held in especial esteem are included. An *ex parte* council, in particular, has occasionally secured a better standing because of such a composition. A good illustration of this is found in the *ex parte* council called in 1858 at Williamsburg, N. Y., which included a few churches in the vicinity, but a majority from a distance, among the delegates being such prominent Baptist laymen as Governors Briggs of Massachusetts and Fletcher of Vermont Such a council, reaching as it did in this case a unanimous decision, would carry more weight with the churches at large than would a small council gathered from the immediate vicinity of the local church.[1] The essential point is not the geographical location, relative to the local church, of the churches invited in, but the

[1] Watchman and Reflector, Aug. 5, 1858.

ability of the churches which are invited to give a fair decision to the case before them.

This suggests a second problem: How can the denomination be protected from *packed* councils? The custom of calling in the neighboring churches has been in itself a partial safeguard against this danger, and any departure from the geographical rule, especially if these churches are not invited, is liable to cast suspicion upon a council unless the facts justify such a variation. Thus in 1845, the Christian Watchman refers to a council held at Augusta, Maine, and impugns its integrity because the council was not composed of the pastors and delegates from churches in the vicinity.[2] The next issue of the paper, however, states that according to a member of one of the Baptist churches in the city where the council was held, there were good reasons for inviting some churches from a distance. It is true in ecclesiastical affairs no less than in political and economic matters, that publicity is in itself a safeguard against fraud. If it is known that a council is packed or if its action is for any reason under suspicion, the churches at large are perfectly free to ignore its action altogether, and as a rule, they will do so. The minute offered by Dr. E. H. Johnson and adopted by a council at West Greenwich, R. I., in 1881, though referring specifically to ordination, is applicable to all other actions which depend upon conciliar approval for their acceptance by the denomination.

> "When a council to examine and ordain is called from churches so limited in number or location as to raise just suspicion that the judgment of other churches is evaded rather than sought, ordination by such a council confers only a formal and not a real endowment, and does not entitle the person so ordained to recognition by other ministers and churches. In such cases a truly representative council should be called to examine the person so ordained, and publish its conclusions."[3]

The Association often has offered an available opportunity for united action on the part of the neighboring churches in any such case of flagrant violation of fairness.

A third problem arises from the possibility of conflicts between councils, of which there have been numerous instances. As a rule these conflicts lie in divergent decisions of councils, one or more of which is under suspicion from the nature of its composition. In the case just referred to, for example, a council by a tie vote had refused

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[2] Christian Watchman, Nov. 7, 1845.

[3] Watchman, Feb. 3, 1881.

to ordain a candidate. The church thereupon called a second and smaller council, which voted to ordain. There were other irregularities introduced in the ordination itself which were the definite matter submitted to a third council for action; the minute passed by this cast out the decision of the second council as being secured under conditions which "raised just suspicion that the judgment of other churches was evaded rather than sought." If we were tracing the local history of councils, we would find some very interesting material connected with conflicting decisions of various councils,—packed, mutual and *ex parte;* but in most cases an unprejudiced mind can reach a reasonable conclusion as to the integrity of the councils. In such cases as are more complicated and the justice of the suspicions not so evident, the method of solution is offered by the institution itself, as suggested in the West Greenwich minute just quoted,—a truly representative council, like the Chevalier Bayard, "without fear and without reproach," should re-examine the case, if necessary, *de novo.*

2. THE RELATION OF THE COUNCIL TO THE CHURCH CALLING IT.

In by far the greater number of cases, a council is called by a single local church, though there are not a few instances where two or more churches have united in issuing the call. This latter would be the normal course where there was a controversy between two churches or where portions of two churches were to be set off as a separate church. Thus in 1814, the churches at Thompson, Conn., and Sutton, Mass., issued a joint letter missive for the purpose of constituting a new church in Dudley (Webster), Mass.[4] There may be other circumstances, as convenience or even sentiment, which make a joint letter missive preferable. In 1904, when a church in Oakland, Cal., united with that at Oak Park in calling a council for ordination,[5] some members of the council considered it an innovation; but as early as 1829, the First Church of Providence had united in a similar call with the church at Eastport, Maine.[6] In each of these cases, it was the home church of the candidate united with that which he was to serve as pastor.

There have been some cases, moreover, when councils have been called without the action of a local church. The *ex parte* council would be the most obvious illustration, but that is generally considered as belonging in a special class and as representing abnormal

[4] Reding, C. W.—Hist. Discourse, 50th Anniversary of Baptist Church of Webster, Mass.

[5] Pacific Baptist, Nov. 2, 1904.

[6] Christian Watchman, May 29, 1829. Also records of the Providence church.

conditions. In 1852, the Trustees of the New Hampton (N. H.) Institution called a council of the churches to consider the advisability of making changes in its curriculum and also of removing the school to Vermont.[7] In 1875, the "Centennial Council" was held at the call of the New York Baptist Ministers' Conference, its action in regard to a suitable recognition of the Centennial by a denominational thank-offering being published as that taken "by a council of churches."[8] In 1876, "in pursuance of a call signed by ministers in Delaware and Pennsylvania, a council convened in the First Baptist Church, Chester, Pa.," to consider the formation of a South Philadelphia Association.[9] Obviously, these councils are exceptional from the nature of the business submitted to them; but in each case the call was issued to the churches for a council; the body, when it convened, considered itself a council; and in each case it seems to have organized itself as such.

Usually, however, the council is convened by a letter missive sent by a local church, and we may assume that such is the case as we consider its relation to the church which has called it. There are three problems which have arisen here in the history of the council.

First, is the church bound to follow the advice of the council in those matters which have been submitted to it? Obviously from the nature of a local church, in the light of the Baptist conception of its independence, there can be no compulsion behind the advice which may be given. When we look at the council in the light of its relation to the denomination, however, we find that as an institution the council carries with its advice a strong moral force. As the council was called into being by the spirit of fellowship, it has usually been considered a breach of fellowship for a church not to follow its advice in matters submitted to it, unless suspicion has been cast upon its fairness. This principle is attested again and again by the recognition of the action of councils by the denomination through other councils, Associations, and in other ways. It is the matter of fellowship which is involved, however, not the ultimate right of the church to decide matters for itself, so far as they concern the local church only.

Another question that has arisen concerns the propriety of the representation in the council of the church issuing the call. The practice has not been uniform in regard to the matter, though often delegates from the church seeking advice have sat in the council. The propriety of such delegates voting has always been seriously

[7] Watchman & Reflector, May 13, 1852.

[8] Report of the Joint Committee of the Centennial Council.

[9] Cook, R. B.—The Early and Later Delaware Baptists, p. 132.

questioned, and for them to vote, if that would decide the matter at issue, would impair and probably vitiate the council's action in the eyes of the churches at large. The delegates from the local church have sometimes been considered a committee from the local church to present the business to the council and in general to look out for the interests of the local body. Thus when the Wallingford, Vt., church called a council in 1803 to consider the advisability of ordaining a deacon, it "voted that Elder Green act with the council in behalf of the church and voted that Colburn Preston serve as a committee to answer in behalf of the church."[10] At recent councils which the writer has attended, however, the delegates of the church calling the council have not been distinguished from those of other churches.

A third question which has arisen, involving the relation of the council to the church calling it, is, Can a council enlarge itself? This has considerable vehemence of argument and perhaps the more consistent theory on the side of a negative answer, while on the other side are a multitude of facts,—that is, precedents.

Says a reviewer, evidently a Baptist, in the "Christian Review" of June, 1841,—

> "How often have we seen councils, after being assembled, proceed to vote that certain ministers accidentally present be invited to take a seat with them and share in their deliberations. But how preposterous. An ecclesiastical council originates in the churches, who have sent their delegates, and therefore cannot be enlarged or diminished by its own action. They have no more right to constitute other members than the General Court, when in session, have to vote that certain spectators in the lobby, be part and parcel of our Legislature. That political body consists of exactly so many delegates as the people send, and no more. The power of enlargement lies not in them. The same is true of the ecclesiastical body of which we are speaking."

In a similar strain runs the "Star Book" of Dr. E. T. Hiscox, which has carried great weight in the denominational counsels:

> "A Council when organized can neither increase nor diminish the number of its members. Its composition is formed by those who called it, and cannot be changed by any other authority. For that reason it cannot admit

[10] Archibald, S. H.—Hist. Sketch of the First Hundred Years of the Baptist Church of Wallingford, Vt.

other persons to membership, nor can it exclude any of those who have been called and appointed to constitute it."

The fact remains, however, that almost from the beginning councils have enlarged themselves, usually, it must be acknowledged, out of courtesy to ministerial brethren present. The earliest specific case which has come to the writer's attention was at Thompson, Conn., in 1798, when it was voted to invite the Rev. Daniel Dow and Deacon Thomas Dike of the Congregational Church in the town to sit in the council, and it is mentioned that the former took an active part in the proceedings.[11] Similar instances of the enlargement of a council by its own vote occurred in Exeter, N. H., in 1800; in Cortland, N. Y., in 1801; in Wallingford, Vt., in 1803 (and this, after the church had formally accepted as a council the brethren who had been sent by the churches); in Dudley (Webster), Mass., in 1814; in Taunton, in 1819; and in numerous other cases up to the present time. It is obvious that there must be no suspicion of unfairness in any such enlargement, which has generally been by unanimous consent.[12]

3. THE RELATION OF THE COUNCIL TO ITS CONSTITUENT CHURCHES.

We have noted that other bodies than churches may issue a call for a council; it is also possible for such a call to be sent to other bodies than churches. Thus the Glenside (Pa.) Baptist Church recently issued a call to the churches of the North Philadelphia Association, seven other churches, the Pennsylvania Baptist State Mission Society and the Baptist City Mission Society of Philadelphia. In the earlier days, as we have seen, the functions now carried on by councils were largely performed by individual ministers or several of them, so it is only natural that it has remained customary, in calling a council, sometimes to include individual ministers in addition to the

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[11] Pinkham, N. J.—"Discourse delivered at the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the Baptist Church, Thompson, Conn."

[12] At a recent council which the writer attended, after the council had agreed without dissent that certain persons be admitted to its membership, the point was raised that since the council had done what, according to Hiscox, a council could not do, the enlarged body was not the council to which the case in hand had been referred, and so could not sit in judgment upon it. The point was overruled by the Moderator; to have allowed it would have been to discredit hundreds of Baptist councils whose decisions have been accepted in good faith. The delegates from the church which called the council had made no protest. There had been opportunity earlier to raise objection, when the enlargement was proposed, or, if the objection had been seriously meant, there was still opportunity to ask for a reconsideration of the vote by which the enlargement had been effected.

churches. So, too, there has occasionally been a council composed only of ministers, as for example, one for deposition which met in Boston in 1904, at the call of the West Medford Church. But in general, the persons sitting in a council are there as messengers of the churches of which they are members.

The main question which arises concerning the relation of the council to its constituent churches may be considered chiefly an academic one. Are the churches really represented in such a council? The question harks back to a more fundamental one,—Can a Baptist church be represented or in any way delegate its powers?—and on this subject the doctors disagree. Dr. Francis Wayland, whose opinions always carry great weight, presents a strong argument in which he denies the possibility "that a church of Christ can be in any proper and legitimate sense represented."[13] Dr. E. T. Hiscox takes a similar position, which he states even more emphatically:[14]

> "A Baptist church cannot represent itself or be represented in any other organization whatever. Let this be said plainly and with emphasis. A Baptist church can send messengers to other churches and to other associations by letters or messengers, or both, but to appoint delegates or representatives to act for them with executive authority and to bind them by such action, would be utterly subversive of their polity, and would place them at once under a *de facto* Presbyterian or prelatical government. For if some convention could be constructed as a representative body, composed of duly accredited delegates, with power to act for the churches, then such convention would constitute an ecclesiastical body superior in authority to the individual churches, with power to legislate for them and decree penalties for dissent."

Both these men make the apparent mistake of confusing representation or the delegation of powers with the absolute surrender of all the rights of the individual church. It by no means follows that because a representative body has been given certain power to act for the churches, it thereby becomes possessed "with power to legislate for them and decree penalties for dissent." As Dr. J. B. Jeter pointed out long ago in his review of Dr. Wayland's book, while "for *certain purposes* churches cannot be properly represented," yet "representatives may be invested with limited and

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[13] Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches, p. 181.
[14] Watchman, Dec. 11, 1890.

strictly defined powers."[15] The whole development of the council as an institution has been based on the assumption that in matters pertaining to fellowship, the council represented the churches in a very true sense, though of course with no legislative functions. The common language of the letters missive and the records of the councils bear out this interpretation. The stately and formal language of Thomas Baldwin, (whose *obiter dicta* are of no little weight in matters pertaining to Baptist polity), at the recognition of the Baptist Church in Charlestown, in 1801, is of some value in revealing the idea of a leading Boston Baptist one hundred years ago as to the relation of a council to its constituent churches.[16]

> "Dearly Beloved in the Lord: The Churches now convened agreeably to your request, by their ministers and messengers, having fully examined the papers you have laid before them, containing an account of all your proceedings relative to your becoming a distinct visible church; have directed me in their behalf to inform you, that they are fully satisfied with your proceedings, and consider them to have been regular and according to the gospel."

Dr. Baldwin would hardly have used such language unless he considered that in a very real sense the messengers in the council represented the churches which had sent them, though he by no means thought that thereby those messengers had any "power to legislate for them and decree penalties for dissent," to use Dr. Hiscox's phrase. The language of Dr. Baldwin is not exceptional, for other similar phrases are found in other recorded addresses on such occasions and in the instructing votes of the councils themselves.

In 1819, the Worcester Baptist Association expressed its idea as to the possibility of a Baptist church being represented, in the Preamble to its Constitution adopted that year:

> "We believe that every visible Church of Christ is independent of all others, with respect to the admission and discipline of its members, and the choice of its Officers. As Churches are thus independent, they, like all other independent bodies, have a right to delegate a part of their powers, when, in their opinion, such delegation will promote their benefit, and the general cause of God, without contravening any law of Christ."

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[15] Christian Review, April, 1857.

[16] Printed in a pamphlet entitled "Sacred Performances at the Dedication of the Baptist Meeting-House in Charlestown, May 12, 1801."

Yet after all, as already said, the question is chiefly an academic one; its influence has been largely confined to the wording of resolutions and has very little affected the development of the Council.[17]

4. THE EX PARTE COUNCIL.

The *ex parte* council has well been termed the "safety-valve" of the congregational polity (independency). It finds its place in those cases of controversy where one of the parties unreasonably refuses to join in such measures as are necessary to secure a mutual council. If the case lies between two churches, it is within the province of either to call a council of its sister churches to advise it in the premises, so no special principle is involved other than that in every council. It is obvious, however, that in such cases of controversy between churches, a mutual council will carry greater weight with the churches at large. In a narrower sense, the term *ex parte* has been applied to a council which is called by a minority of a church, presumably because it believes that it has been deprived of its just rights by the action of the majority. The right of such a council to exist has been called in question, and for that reason, if for no other, it demands some special consideration in our study of the status of the council as an institution.

Just when the first *ex parte* council, in this narrower meaning, was held among American Baptists, the researches of the present writer have been unable to discover; the theory of the *ex parte* council found expression relatively early, and the Congregational churches had found this species serviceable as early as 1669.[18] The earliest date of a Baptist *ex parte* council for which the writer has found definite evidence is 1821, when one was held in connection with troubles in the church at Ovid, N. Y.[19] That same year, a

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[17] An interesting illustration of this is found in the logomachy recorded in the history of the Constitution of the Springfield (Ill.) Baptist Association. In the Constitution adopted in 1837 we find the following:

Art. 2. "This body shall be composed of churches embracing the following" (doctrines). . . . In 1850, this was amended so that it read, "This body shall be composed of messengers from churches embracing . . ." etc. In 1863, the Constitution was revised and we read in the 1st Article, "This Association shall be composed of messengers, who shall be members of, and appointed by the churches which they represent." It is noticeable that there is an advance in the language of 1863 over that of 1850, although it does not recognize the presence of the churches in the Association so explicitly as had the original Constitution. The actual work of the Springfield Association does not seem to have been affected in the least by these changes in phraseology.

[18] Dexter, "Congregationalism," p. 550.

[19] Halsey, "Hist. of the Seneca Bap. Assoc.," p. 165 sq.

query was addressed to the Leyden Association, in Vermont and Massachusetts, by the church at Wardsboro':

> "Is it expedient, when any church is laboring with an offender, that he should call brethren from other churches, without request from the church; and have those brethren so called, or any brother just cause to be offended, if the church, dealing with the offender, should not vote them a seat with the church?"

The query was referred to a committee, and the answer finally entered in the Minutes:

> "As the church is an independent body, we answer in the negative."

The question is awkwardly framed and, as punctuated, forms one question, to which the Association gave one answer. To the latter part of the query only one answer could be given, for the question implies the possible right of an *ex parte* council to demand, on penalty of the severance of fellowship, (for that lies potentially in the idea of a just cause of offense), that the church in question should admit the council to its own deliberations over a case of discipline. More likely the intent of the latter part of the query was to ascertain whether it was a breach of fellowship for the church to refuse to participate in a regularly assembled *ex parte* council, thus making it a mutual body.[20] The negative answer of the Association, under either interpretation of the latter part of the query, cannot be taken as a negative answer to the first part of the query taken by itself,—that is, a denial of the expediency of an *ex parte* council.

This same Leyden Association, in 1813, had been asked to give its opinion whether it was "gospel-wise and tending to increase the fellowship of our churches," for an "ex party (*sic*) council to decide upon a matter of difficulty which a mutual council had previously decided upon, without giving any notice to the mutual council." The answer which a committee of five elders reported back to the Association is rather non-committal, but it is perhaps worth presenting here.

> "We say nothing about the conduct of councils being gospel-wise, as there is no rule in the gospel respecting them; no church ought to feel their fellowship lessened on account of advice given or received, unless there is evidence of corruption."

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[20] Numerous instances might be cited when an *ex parte* council has been transformed into a mutual one by the acceptance by the other party of an invitation to join in the deliberations. E. g., at Kingsbury, N. Y., in 1827.

Our immediate interest lies rather in the query itself, which suggests that such an *ex parte* council had been actually held or at least proposed. To go back still farther, it is probable that the councils referred to in the vote of the Warren Association, in 1785, as having been held on the difficulties in the Sutton church, were *ex parte*, as the contending parties are advised to unite in a *mutual* council.[21]

The principle of the *ex parte* council, however, had found expression as early as 1756, in the Charleston Association in South Carolina. That year, in response to this query,[22]

> "Whether all matters debated in a church are to be determined by plurality of voices, and that determination final, though it grieve the conscience of some?"

the answer was given:

> "No church or majority of a church, has power to bind the conscience; if therefore the majority should introduce errors subversive of the peace of the church, and wound the consciences of the brethren, the minority may, after all proper methods to reclaim the rest by calm reasoning, by calling in the assistance of the other churches, and by referring the matter to the Association, should these prove ineffectual, be received as the church, and the majority disowned."

There has been not a little written both for and against the propriety of the *ex parte* council; but no simpler, yet comprehensive statement concerning it has been made than that just quoted, which has the added endorsement of the actual practice of the Baptist churches at large. It is unfortunate that there should ever be need of such a council. To quote from an editorial in the Watchman of Jan. 18, 1877,—

> "The calling of an *ex parte* uniformly comes from the refusal of a mutual council; and it is incomprehensible to us why a church should ever refuse to unite in calling a mutual council."

The refusal of the majority of a church to call a mutual council is not in itself evidence of injustice on their part; but if the earlier disturbing action of the majority is at all questionable, (even if it follows extreme improprieties on the part of the minority), then their refusal to join in a mutual council to consider all the difficulties makes an appeal to an *ex parte* council *prima facie* justifiable.

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[21] Cf. p. 39.

[22] Furman Wood. "Hist. of the Charleston Assoc.," p. 36.

Churches have usually sent delegates to participate in such councils, and they have been efficient in solving many difficult cases. When they have failed, it has almost always been because they have been not only *ex parte* but also *packed* councils. An *ex parte* council, even more scrupulously than the mutual, must avoid all appearance of being unfairly constituted; its integrity in composition and in its action must be above suspicion. Where this has been the case, the *ex parte* council has a position established historically in American Baptist polity.

5. OPPOSITION TO THE COUNCIL.

It cannot be denied that there have always been some who have opposed the council as an institution, *in toto,* and still more who have resisted certain tendencies in its development. In general, the attitude toward the council is dependent upon one's conception of church independency. The more one conceives of the life of the local church as self-centered, with no inter-church obligations, with all its functions as a church confined within its own membership, the less favor will he have for the council. But as the social obligations of the individual Christian are to-day recognized in addition to the need of such soul-culture as Bunyan depicted in his "Pilgrim's Progress," so the denominational consciousness of American Baptists has been alive more and more to the mutual obligations of the churches. The particularist, however, has been in evidence, and the council has from time to time given him opportunity to put in his plea for absolute independence. One of the strongest attacks upon the council and its very right to exist is to be found in John G. Stearns' book, published in 1832, entitled "The Primitive Church: Its Organization and Government; etc." In Chapter 8, which is entitled "Remarks on Councils," he says:

> "The practice of calling *councils,* to decide on matters of difficulty, and in other cases relating to the government of churches, has become quite common among Baptists. * * * I shall undertake to show that this is departing widely from the principles of church government, as laid down in the New Testament, and acknowledged by every regular Baptist Church."

Very correctly, Mr. Stearns says of the council of Acts 15,—"It was the meeting only of an individual church, properly a *church* meeting." There is a certain unconscious humor in his question, in speaking of Christ's instructions in Matthew 18,—"Why did he not add, If the church are not agreed, appeal to a council?" Mr. Stearns had such an advanced conception of the rights of inde-

pendency that he asserted that if a church even consents to unite with a disaffected minority in calling a mutual council,—

> "In doing this, the church give up their independence, and actually acknowledge the existence of a higher court."

It is evident that Mr. Stearns confused the majority of a church with the church itself. Very few Baptists have gone to the extreme in their opposition to the council that this book manifests, but, to continue the quotation from the editorial of the Watchman,—

> "The opinion seems to be widely prevalent that for a church to submit its proceedings to the advice of a council, is to derogate some way from its independence. A very strange apprehension; for a council can only advise, leaving the church free to accept or decline the advice offered. To ask counsel of another invests him with no authority, and the asking implies no unworthy concession. * * * To assume that the decision of a church majority must not be questioned, is to assert not independence, but infallibility."

CHAPTER V.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL.

Councils may be called to consider whatever matters the church or others issuing the call desire to submit to them; but the most usual purposes for which they are summoned are connected with the standing of churches or ministers, the conservation of peace, and the enlightenment of a church or churches in matters pertaining to the local or general denominational welfare. It may be objected that the sole function of the council is *to give advice* in such cases as are brought before it, and as that has already been said, a chapter on "The Functions of the Council" is an impertinence. Again attention must be called to the distinction which we have been making between an individual council and the institution in its historical relation to the Baptist churches. Strictly speaking, an individual council has but one essential function, the giving of advice; but the council as an advice-giving institution has numerous functions and it is with these that we shall now be more particularly concerned. As, however, from the relation of the council to the denomination, its advice in certain matters carries with it, by custom and general consent, the presumption, unless the integrity of the council is assailed, that the churches at large will accept its decision, the council has sometimes felt warranted in participating itself in the action which it has advised. This co-operation of the council will also call for some attention.

I. THE CONSTITUTION AND RECOGNITION OF CHURCHES.

In the early years, the organization of a church was a simple affair, though the presence of a minister was considered advisable.[1] Morgan Edwards even held that there must be one minister present,

[1]It might be simply by the uniting in church covenant of qualified persons, as in the case of the 1st Bap. Church, Haverhill, Mass., whose record reads: "The 9th day of May, 1765, we whose names are first affixed to the covenant which is here inserted, after solemn fasting and prayer, mutually agreed to walk in gospel order together, having been before baptized by immersion, but not joined to any church."

though that was not involved in his definition of a particular church, which well expresses the typical Baptist view:[2]

> "It is a company of persons called by the gospel, and statedly meeting in one place for the exercise of the Christian religion; who are so confederate among themselves as to be one body, distinct from all other bodies of the like or different sort; and so impowered and authorized, as to be sufficient of themselves to manage their own affairs, so as to obtain the end of a church."

Some of the pastors who went on occasional or frequent evangelistic tours from time to time organized into churches, to which they gave formal recognition, the people whom they gathered together, some of whom they may themselves have baptized. Abel Morgan of Philadelphia, Shubael Stearns and Daniel Marshall in Virginia, and later, Hezekiah Smith, in New Hampshire and Maine, were prominent among those who were active in this work. More often, an individual church would sanction the separation of some of its members and their organization into a new church. The Kittery case already referred to is probably the earliest and a very typical example. There grew up, however, the feeling that a more formal recognition should be secured, though it was not considered absolutely essential. We have already noted a few instances, as that at Cape May Court House, in 1712, where churches sought recognition through the approval of councils. In 1767, the church at Thompson, Conn., dismissed some of its members who were living at Royalston, Mass., that they, with some other Baptists, might form a church there. In a statement at the beginning of their records we read:[3]

> "After being repeatedly disappointed in respect to obtaining ecclesiastical assistance from abroad, the brethren unanimously resolved to form themselves into a church."

This reveals the consciousness that recognition, doubtless through a council or at least through the approval of neighboring pastors,

[2]"Customs of Primitive Churches," Prop. III. In Prop. IV., Edwards gives what he considers an orderly procedure in the constitution of a church, though he would not insist that all of the details were essential. It includes, among other things, the presence of at least one minister, fasting, an examination into the qualifications of those who wish to become members, resulting in satisfaction with their faith and that they have been duly baptized, having had hands laid on them; they then sign the covenant and are pronounced a church. After prayer, they give each other the right hand of fellowship and the kiss of charity.

[3]Minutes of the Wendell Assoc., 1854.

was highly desirable, but not absolutely necessary for the existence of a true church.

As churches began to multiply and to be formed in closer proximity to one another, it very soon became the general rule to seek the advice of a council in their organization. The function of the council has been considered one of "constitution" or of "recognition." The former designation is more closely connected with the idea that a *formal declaration,* by a minister or other representative of the sister churches, that the body of believers is a church of Christ, is much more orderly if not almost essential. Recognition is rather the expression of the fellowship of the sister churches. In some cases churches have had no other recognition than their admission into an Association, though it is more generally the custom for an Association to admit no church till it has been recognized by a council.

The council acts, theoretically, for the churches represented in it, but the language of the records usually makes the recognition or constitution the act of the council. In 1795, a single neighboring church was called in council at Venice, N. Y., but we read that it was "the council" which gave fellowship.[4] In 1805, a council met at Sedgwick, Me., which "constituted" as a Baptist church a former Congregational church which, with its pastor, had gone over as a body to Baptist views.[5]

Councils called to recognize churches have not always considered their tasks merely perfunctory, for in not a few instances they have refused to give the recognition asked for. Sometimes this has been because a factious minority of a church have sought recognition as a new organization, or because the location of the new church would interfere with the growth of a church already established. Thus in January, 1796, a council which met at Stephentown, N. Y., objected to the constitution of a church there "on account of nearness to the Hancock church and the fact that some members were not clear in their relation to former membership in neighboring churches."[6] A second council, consisting of the same brethren, in June of the same year, voted to recognize a church there. Occasionally a council has advised the postponement of the organization of a church till there should be more visible signs of strength; such was the action taken by a council in 1801, which advised against setting off a part of the

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[4]Hist. of the 1st Bap. Church of Romulus (N. Y.)

[5]Mills, R. C.—"Historical Discourse—50th Anniversary of 1st Bap. Church" (Salem, Mass.)

[6]Hist. and Manual of First Bap. Church, Stephentown, N. Y.

Wallingford, Vt., Church as a new church in Mt. Holly; three years later, another council granted the desired recognition.[7]

In 1811, the council which met at Albany, N. Y., for the purpose of constituting the First Baptist Church there, amended the Articles of Faith and Covenant which the church had drawn up; these amendments were accepted by the church without dissent and the council then voted to fellowship the church.[8]

2. DISSOLUTION AND DISFELLOWSHIP.

The same principles which have led to the general practice of submitting to the advice of a council the question of the institution and recognition of new churches, have led to a similar method in regard to dissolution and disfellowship. In 1834, by a majority of one vote, the First Baptist Church of Shelburne and Deerfield had voted to disband; the minority applied to the church in Sunderland, Mass., to be organized as a branch of that church. A council was called in June of that year, which decided that a church could not be dissolved by a simple vote, so there was still a First Church of Shelburne and Deerfield.[9] Any other conclusion would place churches in constant peril; for otherwise a small minority, temporarily in the majority at a business meeting, could put an end to a church's existence. Upon advice of a council, however, a church may vote to disband, or dissolution could presumably be secured without a council by unanimous or even a majority vote, if the matter was properly brought up for action. In 1879, a council which met at Franklin, Mass., "advised the church to bring its existence to a termination." The church thereupon voted to disband, directing the clerk to give letters to any Baptist church to all present members who should apply for them within three months.[10] This case illustrates the normal function of the council in the dissolution of a Baptist church.

It is also the function of councils to advise the disfellowshipping of churches. Attention has already been called (page 40) to the distinction between disfellowship and the severance of the associational tie. Expulsion from an Association, however, is generally from some cause which would involve disfellowship as the next step. One of the earliest formulations of the appropriate procedure in such cases is found in the "Plan" under which the Shafts-

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[7]Archibald, S. H.—Hist. Sketch of First Hundred Years of Bap. Church of Wallingford, Vt.

[8]Manual of First Bap. Church.

[9]Sheldon. Hist. of Deerfield, Mass.

[10]Watchman, July 3, 1879.

bury Association was organized.[11] In its original form, adopted in 1807, it read as follows:

> "Art. V. If any church of the union shall become corrupt in doctrine or practice, it shall be the duty of any sister church who may have knowledge of the same to labor with said offending church. If satisfaction is not obtained, it will then become necessary for the aggrieved church to call for the advice and assistance of other churches; and if they judge there is sufficient ground to suspend fellowship with the delinquent Church, their testimony and report to the Association shall be a sufficient reason to drop it from the minutes, and to publish to the world, that they have withdrawn that fellowship which they had given to said delinquent Church."

In 1828 a new form was adopted, stating more explicitly that a mutual council was to be called, under penalty of the disfellowship of the recalcitrant church and its expulsion from the Association. The writer has found no specific case where a council has been held for such a purpose. In fact, those councils which have apparently disfellowshipped churches, in each case that has come to light in this study of the sources, have been called by minorities within the churches, and the minority has been recognized as the true church. The disfellowshipping of the majority is not, strictly speaking and necessarily, the disfellowshipping of the church itself. Apparently in cases where corruption in a church has not led to internal dissensions and an *ex parte* council, expulsion from the Association has been the only formal step towards denominational disfellowship.

3. ORDINATION.

There have been three leading theories among American Baptists as to the location of the authority to ordain ministers.

(1) It is lodged in the ministry. Most who hold this view believe that the ministers should never exercise this authority independently of the local church.

(2) It is lodged in the individual church. Most who hold this view believe that the local church should seek the approval of sister churches in setting apart any one to the ministry.

(3) It is lodged in the council, which is called together for such a purpose by a local church.[12]

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[11]Wright, Stephen. Shaftsbury Bap. Assoc. from 1751 to 1853.

[12]These three views are well set forth in the "Christian Review" of Sept., 1844.

While it is not within the scope of our present study to consider the nature of ordination as understood by Baptists, it will be pertinent to examine the part which the council has taken historically in connection with ordination, noting especially how various councils have interpreted their duties in the setting apart of a ministry.

Some of the earliest councils were held in connection with the ordination of ministers. The history of some of them has already been told at some length (page 30 sq.). There is no evidence, however, that ordination with the assistance of a council was ever the rule, though the assistance of ministers was considered essential. This was particularly true in the South. In 1789, in answer to a query concerning ordination, the Charleston Association had answered:[13]

> "It is advised, that the church call in the assistance of at least two, but rather three, of the ministers in union, who are the most generally esteemed in the churches for piety and abilities."

In 1808, this same Association made the following answer:

> "It is recommended to the Churches, that on calling out a person to preach, they be careful ordinarily to obtain the assistance of neighboring ministers and churches, in forming their judgment of his qualification, before he be licensed to go out publicly as a minister."

The Bowdoinham (Me.) Association in 1815, in response to a query voted:

> "The ordaining of an Elder, or setting apart of one to the work of the gospel ministry, is the transaction so *solemn* in its *nature,* and so *important* in its consequences, that it would be highly improper for a church belonging to this Association to proceed to the business without the concurrence of a suitable number of sister churches, furnished with Elders, *whom,* among other things, have received the solemn charge, 'Lay hands suddenly on no man.' "[13]

In its circular letters of 1822 and 1824, the Seneca (N. Y.) Association recommended that ordination should be at the advice of an ample council, as the local church "may be feeble and inexperienced, and influenced by undue personal attachment."[14] In 1834, this Association passed the following resolution:[15]

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[13]Wood, Furman—Hist. of the Charleston Association.

[14]Circular Letter of 1822.

[15]Halsey, Lewis—Hist. of Seneca Baptist Assoc.

> "Resolved, in view of the great necessity of particular care in the introduction of brethren into the solemn and responsible office of the Christian ministry, that the churches be respectfully requested to procure the concurrent advice and approbation of neighboring churches and ministers, whenever a candidate, after a suitable trial, is to be licensed to preach the Gospel."

Reference should also be made to the minute adopted by the West Greenwich council in 1881, already quoted. (p. 46.)

Having thus noted these statements which only illustrate the general consensus of Baptist opinion, we turn now more specifically to the function of the council in ordination. In the invitation sent in 1718 for the ordination of Elisha Callendar, the Boston Church asked for Elders and Messengers "to give * * * the right hand of fellowship in his ordination." In its letter missive of 1738, it asked for Elders and Messengers "to assist at ye ordination of our Said Elected Pastor." The Springfield council of 1740 was also to assist in the ordination as was the Warwick council of 1743.

It is most probable that the accounts of councils which have come down to us, particularly in commemorative sermons and in communications to the denominational press, have not always been discriminating in their phraseology. Thus we read in one account of the council called by the Sandisfield (Mass.) Church in 1790, that the church called Benj. Baldwin, "who was ordained by a council of five ministers and nine lay delegates representing five churches;"[16] while in another account we read, "In March, 1790, the church agreed to set Benj. Baldwin apart * * * by ordination by the assistance of the several churches."[17] It is evident that the former statement is loose while the latter more probably states the fact in the case. Yet the constant reiteration of the statement, "the council ordained," in local histories and in the denominational press, with the numerous votes of councils "to proceed to the ordination," makes it evident that some Baptists have considered that the authority to ordain was lodged in the council or delegated to it. To present a few illustrations out of many: In 1806, a council at Weathersfield, Vt., after examining a candidate, voted to ordain him on the day following.[18] In 1829, a council met at Providence, R. I., "for the purpose of examining Mr. Francis Whitefield Emmons and if approved, of ordaining him to the work

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[16]Smith, J. T. "Century of Church Work." Centennial sermon, printed in Berkshire Courier, Aug., 1879.

[17]Hist. of Sandisfield Church. Also in Association Minutes of 1853.

[18]Johnson, R. G. Hist. Sketch of No. Springfield (Vt.) Bap. Ch.

of the Gospel ministry."[19] A council at West Boylston, Mass., in 1832, "proceeded to ordination." We have the statement of J. G. Stearns, in his "Primitive Church," published in 1835, that Baptist "ministers are in all cases (he believes) ordained by the authority of councils." In 1840, at Willimantic, Conn., the council "Voted * * * that we now proceed to set him apart as the Pastor of the church, by solemn ordination."[20] In 1852, a council at Royalston Centre, Mass., "recommends the church to proceed to ordination."[21] The Watchman of Sept. 30, 1869, contains an article by a correspondent who says that at a recent council the motion was made "That the council are satisfied with the relation of Christian experience, call to the ministry and views of doctrine to which we have listened and that we now proceed to ordain the brother to the work of the ministry." A member of the council objected to the last part of the motion on the ground that it was not the council but the church which ordains. The motion was then changed from "proceed to ordain" to "proceed to the service of ordination." The West Greenwich minute already referred to uses the phrase, "a council to examine and ordain." It is evident that councils have differently interpreted their function in ordination; to-day, a vote to recommend the church to proceed to the ordination is probably considered most consistent with the usual form of the call.

It has generally been the custom for the council, through a committee, on which the candidate and the local church as well as the council itself are usually represented, to prepare the order of service for the ordination. Strange to say, there has often been a sensitive feeling on the part of some members of councils if a church has prepared a provisional program in anticipation of the approval of the council. Such action by a local church has even been termed an insult, being interpreted as an assumption that the work of the council would be merely perfunctory. It should be perfectly obvious, however, that the motive is the convenience of all concerned; moreover, unless the ordaining power is lodged in the council, it is difficult to see how the latter has any jurisdiction in the ordination service at all; its work is done when it has passed upon the fitness of the candidate. But for the warrant of a custom (and the so-called "insult" has the equally good warrant of another custom), the council could be charged with infringing upon the rights of the church whenever it has appointed a committee to prepare an order of service, unless the church has asked it so to do. The question in gen-

[19]Christian Watchman, May 29, 1829.

[20]Christian Secretary, June 19, 1840.

[21]Watchman and Reflector, March 11, 1852.

eral, however, is one only of etiquette, although in one case at least the action of a council in connection with the ordination service seems to pass over into a question of polity.

We refer to the action of the council at Pittsfield, Mass., in 1877, called to consider the advisability of ordaining the pastor-elect of the First Baptist Church. After the approval of the candidate as worthy of ordination, he requested that the usual laying on of hands be omitted. The council voted to proceed to ordination, but by vote declined to comply with the request, though it seems to have reached an informal agreement to leave the method of laying on of hands, which seemed to form part of the objection, to be decided by the minister who should offer the ordaining prayer and the candidate. When the prayer was offered, there was no imposition of hands. "The council," remarked The Watchman editorially, "did what it refused to do by vote."[22]

It must be acknowledged that custom has given to the council a share in the preparation of the order of service; unless, however, ordination is by the authority of the council rather than by its advice, it is difficult to see how the council had any real jurisdiction in the matter of the imposition of hands. It would have been more consistent, however, for the candidate not to have made the request to the council unless he either intended to follow its advice or else considered that the council did have jurisdiction in the matter.

Complaint has often been made that councils have been called to meet so near the appointed time for the public services of ordination that they have been obliged to hurry through their deliberations;

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[22]Watchman, June 21, July 5, 12 and 19, 1877. The incident caused considerable discussion, and shortly afterwards, Dr. Alvah Hovey, President of Newton Theological Institution, read to the Boston Baptist Ministers' Conference a paper entitled "On the Imposition of Hands in Ordination," which was printed in the Watchman of Aug. 2, 1877. His conclusions, so far as they related at all to the functions of the council, were as follows:

2. "That this act (laying on of hands) more than any other represents and declares the decision of the council to set apart to the Christian ministry, and therefore it ought not to be omitted * * *

4. "That since what is *represented* and *declared* by the imposition of hands is *authorized* by a council when it votes to set apart to the Christian ministry, the latter act asserts as much authority as the former, and, if the latter act is not on that account objectionable, neither is the former.

5. "That the decision of a properly organized council—made after careful examination—that the candidate is qualified for the work of the ministry and should be entrusted with that office and commended to the churches by a public and solemn service—is the strictly indispensable fact. A suitable announcement of this decision is a matter of great importance; but the decision itself and its publication in some way are indispensible. And in its publication, as far as I can judge, the imposition of hands is fully as important as the prayer of ordination, the right hand of fellowship, or the charge."

it has been charged, even, that councils have been induced to approve of ordination in some cases by the desire to avoid the embarrassment of refusal, as a congregation was already assembling. As early as 1831, (Feb. 12) the Christian Secretary, in an editorial, suggested "the propriety of convening a council for the purpose of examination some time previous to the period fixed upon for the more public exercises." In 1847, the Philadelphia Association recommended the churches "uniformly to leave the appointment of the time for the ordination to the Council they may invite." At some time previous to June 1849, the Baptist ministers of Rhode Island had passed a standing resolution not to proceed to the ordination of any candidate on the same day that the examination should take place. When in that year a council met in Richmond, although the church, unaware of the resolution, had arranged for the public service on the same day, the council "felt compelled by a sense of duty to maintain the rule."[23]

The action of councils in the case of ministers already ordained in other denominations has not been altogether consistent. In such cases as have come to the writer's attention, the ministers who have become Baptists have all come from other evangelical denominations, and, in most cases, the previous ordination has been formally recognized by the councils. In a few cases, the council has been called for the purpose of ordaining the candidate and that has been done. This is the prevailing practice in the South. The action toward ministers coming from the same denomination has varied. Commenting upon the re-ordination of Emory J. Haynes, who for a season left the Methodists for the Baptist fold, the Watchman remarked, "This transaction, though not without example, is, so far as we know, unusual."[24] In September, 1877, a council at Johnstown, N. Y., called to recognize or ordain a man who had been a Second Adventist minister, voted to ordain him.[25]

The custom of formally ordaining deacons is not now so frequent among American Baptists as it was in the earlier days. On quite a number of occasions, councils were held in connection with the ordination services; a list of these, of questionable completeness, will be

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[23]Watchman and Reflector, June 21, 1849. In 1895, the Chicago Association passed the following resolution:

"*Resolved,* That we express our conviction that no church should anticipate the action of a council called for the examination of a candidate for ordination by arranging for the ordination of the candidate in advance of the meeting of the council."

The following year a similar resolution was passed.

[24]Watchman, April 19, 1877.

[25]Watchman, Sept. 27, 1877.

found in Appendix B. Councils have also been held for the ordination of evangelists, as in 1808, when the New Hampshire Association, after adjournment, met as a council at the request of the Gilmanton Baptist Church, and examined the candidate. In 1835, a council at Cortland, N. Y., voted to ordain Samuel S. Day "as an evangelist, and in the afternoon to set him apart for a missionary to preach the gospel among the heathen in a foreign land."[26]. In 1864, a council called to meet in Wellsburgh, N. Y., to consider the propriety of ordaining a candidate as chaplain for the army, voted to proceed to ordination.[27]

In December, 1894, a council met at the Calvary Church, New York City, to consider the propriety of ordaining Henry C. Vedder, who had not been called to a pastorate but was Professor of Church History at Crozer Theological Seminary. The following preamble and resolution were offered:[28]

> "Whereas, the ordination of men who are to be neither pastors nor deacons, to what is called 'the ministry,' implies the conferring of what others call 'holy orders,' and the creation of a third office belonging to no church and responsible to no organization, * * * therefore
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> Resolved, that before we proceed * * * we inquire * * whether such ordination would be in any sense a departure from the long-cherished customs of our churches * * *"

The resolution was laid upon the table by vote of the council, which advised the ordination of Professor Vedder.

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[26]Howell, W. J. Hist. Discourse at Centennial Anniversary.

[27]Watchman and Reflector, Oct. 6, 1864.

[28]Watchman, Jan. 3, 1895. This incident was discussed in the denominational press of the time. The Watchman of Jan. 31, 1895, contains a letter from Dr. E. T. Hiscox, who thought there was neither precedent nor authority for the ordination. There seems no valid objection, however, from the Baptist conception of ordination, to setting apart to certain functions, as those of evangelists, foreign missionaries and theological teachers. There have certainly been precedents for the two former classes; the ordination of Joel S. Bacon, the President of Georgetown College, Ky., in 1831, and that of J. L. M. Curry, the President of Howard College, in Alabama, both cases virtually in response to the feeling that a college president should be a minister, may be cited as precedents for the last class, though neither of these two was specifically a theological teacher.

4. INSTALLATION AND DISMISSION.

"The word 'installation' has been creeping into use among us," remarked one of the leading denominational papers editorially, some twenty years ago, "but the thing never."[29]

It is true that the word "installation" has often been loosely used for a public recognition of a minister who is just entering upon a pastorate, instead of restricting its use to denote the formal induction of a minister into a specific pastorate. Recognition, strictly speaking, implies that the minister has already entered the pastoral office. The mere presence of delegates, invited to attend a recognition service, does not transform the latter into an installation; it becomes practically equivalent to that, however, if the delegates are called in council and are asked to give formal recognition of the new pastoral relation.[30] Moreover, there have been cases among the Baptists where a council has been called to install a pastor, and it has voted to proceed to the installation. So when we read that a Baptist minister has been installed, it may be that he has only been publicly recognized; if we read that he was recognized or installed by a council, we may understand the event as virtually, if not actually, an installation.

The earliest instance of a Baptist installation council, (not to consider that of Congregational churches called by the First Baptist Church of Boston in 1764), distinct from one called primarily to ordain, appears to have been in 1770, when the West Royalston (Mass.) Church called "an ecclesiastical council to install as pastor the Rev. Whitman Jacobs."[31] In 1802, the same church called a council to install Elder Hodge as its pastor.

Late in 1788, the New London (N. H.) church had been recognized by a council and the next week it voted to call as its pastor Elder Seamans, who had been acting as town preacher since June of the previous year. Upon his acceptance, a day was appointed for his formal installation. The large council which convened from four neighboring towns "inquired into Elder Seaman's ministerial qualifications, his dismission from the church (in Attleboro, Mass.) and

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[29] Watchman, April 17, 1884.

[30] The action of the council for public recognition called by the First Baptist Church, Bristol, R. I., may be cited as an instance (Christian Watchman, Nov. 23, 1842).

"Voted, That we are perfectly satisfied with the religious views and experience of the Rev. Edward Freeman, and consent to aid in the services of recognizing him as pastor of this church."

[31] Kenny, Silas. Hist. of the W. R. Bapt. Church, in Wendell Assoc. Minutes of 1854.

recommendation to this church."[32] The second pastor of the New London church was also installed, in 1828. Although he had been previously ordained, "the Council nevertheless proceeded to hear his Christian experience, call to the work of the ministry, and his views of Christian doctrine, as though for re-ordination, not a mere recognition." The third pastor of this church, who began his pastorate in 1836, was not installed.

The church at Barnstable, Mass., installed its pastor in 1802. Delegates from five churches were present, and as a moderator and clerk were chosen, this appears to have been installation by council.[33]

In 1803, Rev. Elisha Williams was installed as pastor of the church at Beverly, Mass. In giving the charge to the pastor, Dr. Stillman of Boston said:[34]

> "On the present occasion, we have not met to *ordain* this our Brother, but to introduce him, as *already ordained,* to the pastoral care of this particular church and society, agreeably to their unanimous call. This might have been done in a private way, but the present mode, in my judgment, is more eligible, because there is an obvious religious fitness in it. The character of a minister of the gospel is sacred and important. Instalment is a solemn covenant entered into between him and the church; no matter how public it is. Let God, angels and men witness the interesting transaction. And may the repeated recollection of it happily prevent pastor and church from acting incompatible with their obligations to God and to each other."

Apparently Dr. Stillman considered the presence and the action of the council as adding to the publicity, the deliberateness and the solemnity of the covenant thus made between pastor and people.

In 1822, a council for installation was held at Roxbury, Mass. This proceeded to the public exercises of the occasion only after examining the proceedings of the church and the testimonials relative to the pastor-elect, and having heard his Christian experience,

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[32] "Centennial History of the Bapt. Church," in History of New London.

[33] Christian Watchman, Sept. 23, 1836.

[34] Dr. Stillman speaks of "the part assigned me by the council," as does another participant, showing that the council arranged the program, at least nominally. The addresses are published in a pamphlet entitled "Sermon delivered at Beverly, June 15, 1803, at the Installation of the Rev. Elisha Williams to the Pastoral Care of the Baptist Church and Congregation in that Town, by Thomas Baldwin, A. M."

call to the ministry, and his views of doctrine and the gospel ordinances.[35]

Similar cases might be multiplied, but sufficient examples have been cited to show that Baptist councils have exercised a function in the installation of pastors. The thing as well as the name has been among American Baptists. Yet it has by no means ever been a general custom among them and was early considered superfluous. The Lincoln Association of Maine declared against installation in 1815, and two other Associations in the same State, the Cumberland and the Bowdoinham, did likewise only a few years later. When in 1837, Elder Kenny became pastor of the West Royalston Church, which, as we have just seen, had already installed two of its pastors, he entered his pastorate by simple vote of his church. He doubted, we are told, the expediency and the authority of the *common practice* of installing ministers already ordained.[31] The custom of installation, however, has gradually died out among the Baptists and councils are now rarely, if ever, called for that purpose.

It seems fitting that a church which calls a council to install its pastor should call another when the pastoral tie is to be severed; yet councils for dismission, except in cases of internal discord, have rarely been held among American Baptists. In his "Fifty Years among the Baptists," David Benedict wrote, "It may be well for the Baptists to call councils for the *dismission* as well as for the settlement of their pastors." In 1792, a council was held at East Cornwall, Conn., which was unable to find grounds sufficient for it to advise the severance of the pastoral relation in the church there.[36] In 1832, the council which was called to consider the ordination of the successor of Rev. Jonathan Going, was also asked "to express their opinion respecting the dismission" of the latter who was about to enter upon new duties in connection with the organization of home missionary work.[37] This really looked forward to Dr. Going's new work, however, rather than to the severance of the pastoral tie which was involved; the council would probably not have been called for the purpose of considering the dismission only. The other cases of councils called to consider dismissions apparently were primarily in the interests of peace.

Reference may be made to an agreement entered into between Rev. Isaac Skillman and the Baptist church and congregation and

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[35] Christian Watchman, April 13, 1822.

[36] Fennell, W. G., Hist. Address, College St. Bapt. Church, East Cornwall, Conn.

[37] Christian Watchman, Jan. 27, 1832.

their Trustees at Salem, N. J., in 1791, which concerned the dissolution of the pastoral relation in case of discontent.[38]

> "And further the said parties agree and promise each to the other that if any discontent on the part of the said Mr. Skillman, whereby he should wish to be dismissed from serving said Church and Congregation, or if any discontent should arise in the Church and Congregation that they should wish to have the said Mr. Skillman dismissed from being their minister, in either case, they may, if either of them see meat (*sic*) call the minister and two of the members from Cumberland and Wilmington Baptist Churches to judge between them, and their determination shall be binding to each party."

The judges thus provided for may not strictly be considered a council; moreover, the agreement does not seem to apply to a severance of the pastoral tie by mutual consent. On the other hand, it does not apply to differences between pastor and people except when these lead to the desire on one side or the other for the termination of the pastoral relation. It is apparently intended to apply to the situation before an acute stage is reached, and so may be called an agreement for a council of dismission as well as in the interests of peace.

5. DEPOSITION AND RESTORATION.

If ministers are given standing among the churches by receiving ordination only upon the approval of a council, it is only consistent that their standing should not be wholly at the mercy of a majority in a single church, but that they should be deposed, if unworthy, similarly by the advice of a council which should examine into the case. Likewise, if a deposed minister be found later worthy of readmission to the ministerial office, he should be restored only upon the advice of an adequate council.

In 1793, a mutual council, called to consider charges against the pastor of the Marshfield (Mass.) church, advised the church to depose him from his office and the church thereupon did so.[39] In 1814 the Lincoln (Me.) Association

> "Voted, that it is the opinion of the Association that it is expedient that a council be called by the Churches, to depose an elder from or restore him to his office."

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[38] Semblower, A. H., Hist. of 1st Bapt. Church, Salem, N. J.
[39] Centennial History of Marshfield Church.

The Muscle Shoal Association of Alabama, in 1823, expressed a similar opinion in regard to restoration.[40]

> "'Query. Is it good order, or not, for a church to restore an ordained minister, who has been excluded, to the full functions of the ministry, without the aid of a presbytery?' Answer. We think it not in order in a church."

These expressions by the Associations are evidently not intended as innovations, but as reflections of the ideal polity of the times. In the South, it has been more customary to have a council consisting only of ministers to sit in judgment upon such cases; and in the North, that method has been occasionally employed. In 1825, the Ministerial Conference of the Woodstock (Vt.) Baptist Association deposed a minister,[41] and as recently as 1904, a mutual council composed of leading ministers which met at Tremont Temple, Boston, advised a suburban church to depose one of its members, a former pastor, from the ministry.[42] In a case which seriously disturbed the First Church of New York City in 1829, a committee of the church investigated the charges against the pastor, and submitted their report to five neighboring Baptist ministers of repute for their review.[43] Somewhat similarly, the Waco (Texas) church in trying their pastor for heresy in 1889, invited in the other Baptist pastors of the city to sit as an advisory council.[44] This council was not to try the case, however, but to observe the proceedings of the church that it might certify to the fairness of the trial.

In 1840, a council called to consider troubles in one of the churches in New London, Conn., which had deposed a minister, excluding him and several other members, in addition to its recommendations on the specific business submitted to it, passed the following resolution:[45]

> "Resolved, That it is the deliberate decision of this Council that it is inexpedient for a Church of Christ to proceed in their discipline against a minister to his exclu-

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[40] Holcombe, Hosea. History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Alabama. p. 166.

[41] Christian Watchman, Feb. 12, 1825.

[42] Watchman, May 12, 1904.

[43] "The Proceedings of the First Baptist Church of New York in Relation to the Slanderous Charges brought against their Pastor, Elder William Parkinson, by Maria Shade, otherwise called Maria Scaman."

[44] "Trial of M. T. Martin by the First Baptist Church at Waco, Texas." Official Report.

[45] Christian Secretary, Jan. 15, 1841.

sion, without first calling to their aid an ecclesiastical Council."

In 1879, a council was called at Athens, N. Y., to review the action of the church there in withdrawing fellowship from its late pastor. The council approved the action, which, however, in its opinion, it would have been wiser for the church to have taken after, rather than before the advice of the council was sought.[46]

In most of the cases where councils have been called to consider the deposition of ministers, the charges preferred have involved moral lapses. It is not within our sphere to consider these in detail, and already enough has been said to show the normal way in which such cases have been treated.[47] In a few cases the charges have been of heresy, which councils have considered in some instances as sufficient warrant for deposition from the ministry. In 1823, for example, the First Church of Trenton, N. J., called a council of four clergymen, of whom three only met, who found that the pastor had "departed from the faith of the particular Baptist Church," and they advised that he should "be immediately notified that until he renounces his errors, he cannot have fellowship as a regular Gospel minister."[48] The church thereupon took precipitate action, at once excluding the pastor from fellowship. In 1859, the Keokuk, Iowa, church was advised by a council to exclude a minister who held open communion views.[49]

There have not been many cases of councils called to restore ministers previously deposed from the ministry, though probably there have been more than the few which have come to the attention of the present writer. All the cases examined have been faulty in the light of true principles of fellowship, in that the councils have been significantly small, or were divided as to their advice, or failed to show proper respect to the councils which had acted in the deposition of the ministers in question. Thus in 1854, a council at Jefferson, Me., restored a minister by a vote of 11 to 4.[50] In 1877, a

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[46] Watchman, Feb. 13, 1879.

[47] A council which was held in Akron, Ohio, in November, 1877, which voted to ordain a candidate, was recalled very soon afterwards, serious charges being brought against the man. It decided that he had deceived it at its first session and so voted the ordination "null and void," and withdrew the hand of fellowship. The action in annulling the ordination is criticised by the Baptist Weekly. Quoted, with comment, in the Watchman, Jan. 31, 1878.

[48] Miller, D. H. "Historical Discourse."

[49] Watchman and Reflector, Sept. 15, 1859.

[50] Watchman and Reflector, July 27, 1854.

small council, after a larger council had taken adverse action, was called and voted to ordain a man who had been deposed and excommunicated by another denomination,—thus virtually restoring him to the ministry.[51] In 1895, a council at N. Kennebunk, Me., by a vote of 8 to 3, advised the reinstatement of a man deposed by advice of a council held a few years previously in another state; this council voted down a motion which looked to the consideration of the action of the earlier council, thus ignoring the obligations of fellowship, on which very principle alone the council itself could claim any right to exist.[52]

6. COUNCILS CALLED IN THE INTEREST OF PEACE.

It has sometimes occurred that councils called ostensibly for other purposes have actually done their work in the interests of peace. Thus, as we have seen, councils invited for the recognition of churches have taken into account the relation of the prospective new church to those in the vicinity already established; pastors who ask for dismission by a council, or ministers against whom are brought charges which, if proven, will lead to deposition, very often have a personal following among the members of their own churches, so that the latter may be threatened with disruption. In such cases the lack of peace is not always formally recognized in the call for the council. The *ex parte* council, also, which from the very nature of its creation presupposes a lack of harmony sufficient to make a mutual council possible, may be mentioned. All of these classes have already been referred to; it will be necessary to add here only that it has sometimes been difficult to decide whether a particular case might better have been postponed to be considered in this connection.

It will be recalled that the first council of which we have found definite evidence was that which was invited by the Middletown (N. J.) church in 1712, to advise the church in regard to a division which had thrown it into a distracted condition. The method, while not that agreed to five years earlier by the churches in the organization of the Philadelphia Association, was nevertheless fully in accord with the principles of fellowship which had been clearly stated by the Baptists both of England and America. While from 1712 onward the Philadelphia and other Associations, through committees and in other ways, did what they could to conserve peace and to restore harmony where that had been disturbed by discord within a local church or between the churches, the council has more often been

[51] Watchman, Oct. 25, 1877.

[52] Watchman, Oct. 24, 1895.

used to exercise this irenic function, especially after there has been any open rupture.

We will turn first to the function of councils in cases where the discord is between local churches and then where it is primarily internal. Perhaps one of the most delicate situations in inter-church relations arises when a church desires to admit to its membership those who have been apparently unjustly excluded from a sister church. Churches which have asserted most vigorously their right, because of their independent status, to exclude members without interference on the part of any other church, have often been most sensitive when another church has asserted its independence by admitting these excluded individuals to membership. It is pertinent to our subject for us to notice some of the utterances of denominational bodies on this problem of inter-church comity. As early as 1815, the Bowdoinham Association of Maine, in response to the query,

> "Is it agreeable to Apostolic Order, and for the peace, harmony, and union of churches, for one church to receive a member who is excluded from another church of the same faith and order, until it is made evident that the church excluding, is corrupt in discipline, and struck out of the fellowship of the associated body?"

made answer (according to Millet, it was in concurrence with a vote of the Cumberland Association of 1812),—

> "Each church is independent with respect to discipline," and also that "an association of churches have no power to abrogate the censures of an individual church; and therefore all questions and difficulties between churches and difficulties between churches and excluded members, are to be decided by councils of ministers and churches appointed by the consent of parties; and therefore a second church may receive an excluded member by the advice of a council so called, if the church excluding refuses to receive such a member at the advice of such council."

This principle has generally been accepted by American Baptists, although there have been occasional instances where a church has taken umbrage that its exscinding action has not settled for all time the ecclesiastical standing of the persons involved. Specific reference may well be made to the action of a representative council held in New York City in 1851, at the call of the Tabernacle Church, which desired to admit to its membership three men who had been excluded from the First Baptist Church of that city, the latter body

having declined to join in calling a mutual council. This council comprised delegates from twenty-seven churches in New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and included several men of exceptionally high repute in the denomination. Five of the latter as a Committee, drew up a statement in the form of Resolutions, which were adopted by the council as expressing the true relation of the principles of independence and fellowship involved.[53]

> "1. *Resolved,* That the independence of each Baptist church is sacred and inviolable, but is also, as between one church and another, as equal as it is sacred; and each church has the authority given by Christ to administer his laws, responsible to him alone.
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> "2. *Resolved,* That it is an established principle that no Baptist church is clothed with legislative powers to make new terms of membership or fellowship other than those already provided in Christ's code and constitution, the New Testament, and that if in any case a church be thought by a sister church to have already transcended the ordinary usages of our churches, and these, the principles of the gospel, in the exclusion of members, and if the church so judging, after having fraternally employed all proper and practicable means to induce the exscinding church to reconsider their act, deem it required by Christian equity, they may proceed in the exercise of an equal independency to receive into their own fellowship, such excluded brethren.
>
> "3. *Resolved,* That in view of the evils which must ensue from such apparent collision of independent churches, any church feeling itself called to such reception of the excluded of another church, should move only after the most patient and thorough scrutiny, and should regard the step as a most grave one, to be taken only under circumstances pressing and peculiar.
>
> "4. *Resolved,* That on the other hand, to acknowledge no power in any sister church to rectify an oversight or a wrong out of the discipline of another church would be, to give to any exscinding church, a sovereignty and infallibility, as before all sister churches, which is not consistent with Christian equity, and Christian freedom—not consistent with the best practices of our best churches in their best days—and not consistent with the principles of the New Testament and its ecclesiastical polity."

[53] Watchman and Reflector, April 24, 1851.

This action did not explicitly mention the council, but it is obvious that the second and third resolutions involve the consideration of the situation by a council as a fraternal means of a "most patient and thorough scrutiny." The Resolutions were not considered legislative on the part of the council, but merely an expression of what they believed was the general opinion of American Baptists in the face of such conditions as confronted the Tabernacle Church at that time.

From such a case, involving the part of a council in determining the ecclesiastical rights of excluded members who desire to unite with some other church, it is a natural transition to those instances where councils have been called to consider cases of internal discord, when a minority considers that it has been unjustly treated, perhaps even to the extreme of exclusion,—but a minority whose cause is not espoused by another church. Too often, the church concerned has considered it a yielding of its independence or even a qualified acknowledgment of wrong-doing on its part if it consents to a mutual council. It would be the reduction of the majority to the level of the minority. From such a feeling came the query addressed to the Warren Association in 1804:

> "Whether a church, after long forbearance and painful discipline, have deposed their pastor, and suspended his privileges for immoralities; can they consistently join him, at his request, in a mutual council?"

Though in this case the minority consisted of only one, the principle involved was the same as though many members had been suspended. The Association saw the council in its true relation to the local church and also the wider interests of the churches at large which were involved; for an answer it

> "Voted, * * * That it is the opinion of this Association, that it is not inconsistent with divine rule for a church, if they see fit, to unite with a person who has been excluded from them in a mutual council."

While there have been numerous cases where churches have acted in accord with this principle, there have been too many instances where a church has insisted upon its rights of independency, and by refusing a mutual council has left not merely to the minority but to sister churches as well, no other recourse for their guidance than that to an *ex parte* council.

7. PROMOTION OF LOCAL OR GENERAL DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND WELFARE.

While all councils are called avowedly for advice, from most of them is sought merely approval of a line of action which has pre-

viously been practically decided upon by the local church which has called the council. Occasionally, however, councils have been invited to meet to confer with some local church concerning a situation in which the course of subsequent action is not yet marked out. In the case of the constitution of new churches, for example, there is generally an agreement on the desirability of the project upon the part of those directly concerned before a council is called. Under such circumstances the council of recognition does little more than sanction a movement already determined upon. There have been cases, however, when the opinion of neighboring churches has been sought not merely as a matter of form but from a genuine desire to receive the counsel of others who may give sympathetic, though unbiased advice, that the line of action may be the more confidently marked out. Reference has already (page 61) been made to the case at Wallingford. In 1803, the church at West Royalston, Mass., called a council to consider the advisability of its reunion with the Warwick church, from which it had earlier been separated.[54] In 1846, the church at Thompson, Conn., referred to a council the question of its division into two new churches.[55]

Other questions of local importance have arisen which have led churches to seek the advice of sister bodies. Many times, probably usually, this is done through committees and informal conferences or through the Association, but on several occasions recourse has been had to a regularly called and organized council. Thus in 1795, the church at Wallingford, Vt., voted to call a council for advice on the location of their meeting-house.[56] On April 29th of that year, the town voted

> "to request the council that is to attend at Elisha Button's next Thursday * * * to give their advice in a place where a meeting-house ought to be built for the accommodation of the town of Wallingford, and seal the same and deliver it into the hands of the town clerk, to be opened at a future day to which this meeting shall adjourn."

The council made its decision and apparently followed the request of the town; at least, the decision of the council in the matter appears in the town records of May 11, 1795, as well as in the

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[54] Kenny, Silas. Hist. of the W. R. Bap. Church, in Minutes of the Wendell Assoc., 1854.

[55] Pinkham, N. J. Discourse delivered at the 100th Anniv. of the Organization of the Bap. Church, Thompson, Conn.

[56] Archibald, S. H. Hist. Sketch of the First Hundred Years of the Bapt. Church of Wallingford, Vt.

church records. At the adjourned town-meeting, however, there was a tie vote on the question of adopting the recommendation of the council.

Mariners' churches, from the very nature of their constituency, have special need from time to time of the co-operation and advice of their sister churches. In 1841, a council of all the Baptist churches in New York City was held to consider the expediency of forming such a church for seamen.[57] The Mariners' Church of Boston in 1858 sought the advice of a council concerning the expediency of providing a more suitable house of worship.[58] It is evident that weaker churches, which are to a considerable extent dependent upon other churches for support, will submit to the counsel of these other churches details which a stronger church would settle for itself.

The council has further been found serviceable in the consideration of matters of more general denominational interest than such local affairs as we have just been noticing. Reference has already been made (page 48) to a council called to consider the policy to be followed by the New Hampton Institution, involving the denominational interests in New Hampshire and Vermont, and to that called at Chester, Pa., to consider the formation of a new Association. In 1875, the so-called Centennial Council met in New York City to advise concerning a denominational observance of the national centennial; it recommended the raising of a Centenary Thank-offering for the purposes of education, the payment of church debts, the erection of church edifices, parsonages, etc., and the enlargement of permanent missionary funds.[59]

The serviceability of the council is very apparent from this brief survey of typical illustrations of its various functions. It is certainly true that one cannot appeal to the New Testament for a precedent in all if in any of these cases; but the New Testament does recognize very distinctly the obligations of fellowship and represents the various members of the body of Christ as in organic relation with one another. It is this vital principle which has underlain the evolution of the Baptist council, not any insistence upon organization or a stereotyped system of church polity.

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[57] Hist. Sketch of 1st Mariners' Church, N. Y.

[58] Watchman and Reflector, Sept. 23, 1858.

[59] Report of the Joint Committee of the Centennial Council.

CHAPTER VI

THE FURTHER RELATION OF ASSOCIATIONS AND COUNCILS

We have already shown through numerous references to the action of Associations the general attitude of these bodies towards Councils and their functions, the reasons prompted by enlightened interests which led some to encourage the historical development of the Council as an institution and to recognise it as an integral part of the Church's system of government. In the present chapter our purpose is to examine the study of the relation of the Associations to the Council, noting especially in what ways they have affected the trend of the Council's development up to the present time.

Long after the Council was well established and there was general agreement as to its normal place in many church relations and in spiritual sovereignty the question was still asked what the Association ought to carry on through the Council and what by their own more directly personal activities. This is true even of those Associations which realized most and the practical advantages of the Council and had recommended it to the churches under their care. The Associations have always considered themselves fundamentally advisory councils, though with more general functions than those which belong to the Council as the specially called body. In fact, among the Associations there have been relatively few councils called for what Dr. Dexter called "Type I" or for what we have called the promotion of local or general denominational welfare, as the Association itself has been found an efficient body for consultation in these matters. The activities of Associations have covered a wide range, and instances can be found where some Association has done almost everything that a council has been called upon to do. Many Associations have had no other formal organization than their advisory and ex-Councils. In fact, Associations have usually fulfilled a good deal of the function of a council while maintaining in an Association of a somewhat ordinarily restricted form an Association that has been considered as de facto its denominational fellowship.[1]

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[1] Of course of the National Conference is true. The previous year a committee was appointed to urge the Cambridge church and labor with it, the committee reported to the Association that the church refused to have

Associations have been obliged occasionally to take steps toward the harmonizing of factions within a church, as when each of two factions claims to be the church, sending messengers to the annual meeting; under such circumstances, it is necessary for the Association itself to decide which set of messengers, if either, is entitled to sit in its meeting. So also Associations have been forced to act when they have found their own sessions disturbed or their peace threatened by discord between two churches, each belonging to their membership.[2] One of the original purposes of the Philadelphia Association, it will be remembered, was to harmonize differences between a local church and some of its members, a principle readily extended to differences between churches.

There have been not a few cases where councils for ordination have been called in connection with the meeting of an Association, generally for the sake of convenience. While in some cases the records or notices are ambiguous, there have been a few instances when the Association itself has acted as an ordination council. Reference has already been made to the New Hampshire Association in 1808, when after adjournment, the same body met as a council and ordained an evangelist. In 1825, during the first meeting of the Wendell Association (Mass.), three men were ordained as were two men at the meeting of the French Broad Association (N. Car.), that same year. The Chemung Association in 1810 resolved itself into an ordination council, and in 1831, the Ashford Conference did likewise. In 1868, on invitation of the Richland (Ill.) church, the ministers and messengers composing the Springfield Association met as a council, in connection with its annual meeting, to consider the propriety of ordaining a candidate to the ministry.[3] In other cases, the Association itself has acted without transforming itself by any formal vote into a council. Thus in 1831, the ministers and delegates of the Westfield Conference (Mass.) met in response to a *letter missive sent to that body* by the First Baptist Church in West-

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and that its visibility was at an end; whereupon the Association voted "that the hand of fellowship be withdrawn." Crocker, Henry. Hist. Sketch of the Lamoille (Vt.) Bapt. Association, 1796-1896.

[2] In 1799, the Georgia Association, upon hearing of "an unhappy difference" between two of the churches requested an elder to address a letter to one of them "expressive of the views of the Association in relation to the difficulty." In 1806, it appointed a committee, in response to the request from the church at Sardis for advice in a dispute between that church and the Salem church, to visit the churches and labor for a reconciliation. Mercer, Jesse. "A Hist. of the Georgia Bapt. Assoc." Other cases have already been mentioned (pp. 39, 40).

[3] Walker, E. S. Hist. of the Springfield Bapt. Assoc.

field.[6] Two cases in the Philadelphia Association will be referred to presently.

Associations have also taken action in the deposition of ministers, without recourse to a special council for that purpose. To refer to a few specific cases,—in 1807, the Vermont Association deposed a minister. In 1819, the Fairfield (Vt.) Association appointed a committee to inquire into a church and the character of its former minister: in 1818 it appointed a committee to examine into the character and standing of a minister who had been deposed by a church. These last two cases are not strictly cases of deposition by an Association, but they reveal the easy possibility of the absorption of the functions of the council by the Association.[7] In 1822, the Georgia Association was appealed to by the minority of a church which adhered to the minister whom the church, by a majority vote, had deposed from the ministry and expelled from its own membership. The Association considered the case, but not only refused after investigation to recognize the minority as the church, but approved the action of the majority in deposing the minister.[8] In 1825, the Middle Moral Association (Ala.) adopted the report of a committee pronouncing a certain preacher in disorder, and recommending that he be no longer recognized as a preacher of the Gospel.[9] In 1832, the Eastern Maine Association sanctioned the act of a church in deposing a minister.[10]

Notwithstanding these instances and others which might be mentioned, it remains true that it has been the exception that cases which concern the denominational standing of churches or ministers have been submitted to the Associations. These bodies themselves, as we have seen, considered reference to a council as more binding, and as a matter of fact, the number of such cases so referred far exceeds the number acted upon by Associations. The fear lest the latter bodies should develop into synods, with legislative and even coercive powers, has made the majority of the Baptists prefer the council, in spite of that looseness in the relation of

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[6] Christian Secretary, Jan. 22, 1831.

[7] Among the Congregationalists, the Association grants the license to preach and after ordination, the ministerial standing rests in the Association which has the power of suspension and deposition. Councils are held for ordination, though in Sept. 1904 the Bay Association of California, at the request of one of its churches, examined two candidates already licensed by the Association and recommended their ordination.

[8] Mercer. "History of Georgia Assoc."

[9] Holcombe, Henry. "History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Alabama."

[10] Miller, Joshua. "A History of the Baptists in Maine."

any specific council to the denomination, which has especially exposed the latter to the danger of being misled by packed councils. This has been a very real danger and still exists, to judge by occasional utterances in the denominational press; in fact, the most vulnerable spot in the whole institution is the composition of the individual council; who is to guarantee to the larger fellowship of the churches the integrity of its composition and its competency to render impartial and conclusive advice? It has been the conviction that the rights of the larger fellowship of the churches needed protection from unfairly constituted councils that has led to the most significant development of the council since the institution has won its acceptance as a part of the denominational polity,—namely, its closer co-ordination with the Association, which from its position in the denomination, its relatively well defined boundaries, the regularity of its meetings and the publicity of its records, affords almost the only opportunity for even a quasi-denominational oversight over the action of local councils. The general feeling that as a rule the churches in the same Association as the church calling the council should be included among the churches invited, has been referred to.[9] In fact, from the very form which inter-church fellowship had developed, it was most natural for the associational unit to present itself as the normal one for the council. Similarly, the Association offered itself as the most obvious and convenient intermediary between the local council and the churches at large. The problem is, however, to make use of the Association and not have as the inevitable consequence the elimination of the council as superfluous. Such a result would change the status of the Association; at least it would enlarge its usual functions and would savor too much of presbyterianism to satisfy the Baptists, who are devoted to independency as the biblical polity and as more in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel. Yet the possibility of making some use of the Association, by giving it some co-ordinate or supervisory power with the council, probably accounts for the continued activity of the Association in matters which had come to be referred more usually to special councils, and for the action of the Philadelphia Association, together with the more recent action of other Associations, which must now engage our attention.

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[9] "The recommendation adopted by many of our New England Associations that any church in calling a council should include in the letters missive the churches of the Association to which it belongs is based on too sound a principle to be lightly set aside. The decisions of a council composed of churches selected because of their relations to the question to come before it inevitably fail to carry the weight to which the findings of such a body should be entitled."—Watchman, Jan. 21, 1904.

THE PLANS OF THE PHILADELPHIA ASSOCIATION, 1837 AND 1841.

In its very inception and throughout its history, the Philadelphia Association has been considered by the churches composing it as an advisory council; its records contain numerous references to matters which might have been submitted by the local church immediately concerned to a specially called council, but which were referred instead to the Association. As we have seen, there is nothing unique in this, and in general, the attitude of this original and in some ways most prominent Association toward the council was not different essentially from that of other Associations. It has advised that councils be held; it has itself acted as a council.

It was in temporary efforts, (which may be divided into two episodes), to safeguard the ministerial office, that the Philadelphia Association took action looking toward the closer co-ordination of that body with the council. One of its earliest votes, passed in 1723, reads as follows:—

> "Agreed, that the proposal drawn by the several ministers, and signed by many others, in reference to the examination of all gifted brethren and ministers that come in here from other places, be duly put in practice, we having found the evil of neglecting a true and previous scrutiny in those affairs."

The latest instances when the Association was itself asked to examine candidates for ordination, with no reference to any other council, were apparently in 1833 and 1836. On each of these occasions, the Association appointed committees to examine the candidate and then arranged for the ordination services upon the recommendation of the committees.

The looseness of the practice of the churches in the important matter of ordination had given opportunity for some unworthy men to gain ministerial standing, whose later careers not only blighted the Christian cause in the community where their sins had come to light but had cast reproach upon the whole sisterhood of churches. It was in the hope of reducing if not eliminating the possibility of such evils that led the church of Lower Merion, in 1835, to address the following query to the Association:

> "Cannot a more consistent and uniform method of licensing and ordaining ministers be recommended to the churches?"

This was referred to a committee of five, with instructions to report, if practicable, at that session of the Association. The committee felt the need of a longer consideration of the question, so it

was requested to report early at the next meeting. In 1836, however, the committee asked for more time, and another member was added to it. It is evident that the Association considered the matter one of grave importance. Although the question had not been decided, the Circular Letter of that year referred to the licensing of ministers, saying,

> "It is the privilege as well as the duty of every church, when called in the providence of God to approve of the public gifts, to summon to her aid the counsel of the wise and experienced, and then participate with them in their deliberations; but further than this she should never venture."

In 1837, the committee appointed in 1835 brought in its report, setting forth the following facts and principles bearing upon the question of licensing and ordaining ministers:

(1) The denomination at large desired and demanded an essential reform in the matter.

(2) The laxity of the prevailing method was recognized and deplored.

(3) Some churches are in such a feeble state as to be incompetent to decide on the adequacy of ministerial talent and will be guided too much by personal considerations.

(4) While acknowledging the independency of the local church, the committee asserted that her power had limitations in the act of consecrating and sanctioning her gifts to the Gospel ministry.

(5) If the power of licensing and ordaining lies in the ministry (as some hold), it can be exercised only at the instance of the church; if it lies in the church (as others hold), she must use it in a way which shall tend to the general good. If it lies in neither separately, but in the two jointly, ordination should be a ministerial act at the request of the church.

(6) The importance of guarding the very entrance to the Gospel ministry makes advisable a similar participation of power in the act of bestowing license.

In addition to these general considerations embodied in the report, the committee proposed the adoption of the following resolutions:

> "*Resolved,* That this Association elect annually by ballot a committee of three to unite with a committee selected by any church of this Association desirous of licensing or ordaining one of their members to the work of the ministry; the concurrence of one or more of the Associational committee, when all have been duly noti-

fied, shall be regarded as satisfactory, and shall commend said candidate to the favor of all the churches.

"*Resolved,* That it shall be the duty of said joint committee, when sitting in council with any church, to make an impartial inquiry into the moral and religious character of the candidate, to examine into his call to the ministry, his theological views, and his qualifications for a responsibility so vastly important; moreover, they shall embrace an opportunity of hearing him preach, and if in their judgment he is a suitable person for the ministry, they shall recommend him accordingly to the church, and participate with them in the licensing or ordination.

"*Resolved,* That any church calling a brother to ordination, shall apprize the committee of their desires, at least two weeks previously to the time the council are to meet.

"*Resolved,* That it shall be the duty of the Associational committee to make an annual report to the Association, of the number they have examined for license, their names, and the churches to which they may belong; and also, the names of those in whose ordination they have participated.

"*Resolved,* That the churches be most affectionately invited and recommended to sustain the order here commended to their notice."

A resolution was offered that the churches be asked to consider the recommendation of the committee and report to the Association at its next meeting. After a long discussion, the report was referred back to the committee to which five members were added. They then reported the matter again to the Association, which adopted the five resolutions, and elected three brethren to serve on the committee thus established.

It is not at all surprising to read in the Minutes of the next year that the plan was "disapproved of by some of our churches, so that unanimity cannot be secured in carrying it into effect," and that consequently it was voted "That the appointment of said committee be dispensed with." The plan was too great a departure from the customary method; it utterly ignored the council, which was already a well-established institution, substituting for it the Associational committee of three to examine into the qualifications of the candidate. According to the wording of the first resolution, the approval of one member of this committee was sufficient to warrant the

church to proceed to the ordination; the ordination would be valid and the man would be recommended as though by the Association itself, though the other two members of the committee might consider the man utterly unworthy. The approving member might even be a member of the church asking advice, which would place the whole question of the ordination and its acceptance by the Association within the control of the one church. Possibly the intent of the resolution was to make one member of the committee a quorum, provided all the members were duly notified. The refusal of the Association to refer the matter to the churches for their opinion, before adopting it as the method approved by that body itself, naturally aroused some prejudice against the plan and lent some color to the charge that the Association was legislating for the churches; yet the plan was only suggested and recommended to the churches. As adopted, it permitted such churches as approved it to make use of it immediately.

Although the failure of the scheme is not surprising—the marvel is that it was passed at all—the ending of this first episode is an anticlimax, after the long consideration of the question by the committee appointed in 1835 and the urgency of the Association in the adoption of the new plan in 1837. After dispensing with the appointment of the committee, the Association merely "earnestly and affectionately recommended to the churches who are about to license or ordain any member, that they invite some of the Pastors and Deacons of the neighboring churches to participate in their deliberations." A very mild resolution, indeed, asking that the obligations of fellowship be recognized in the matter of licensing as well as in ordaining preachers; but it almost raises the question if the Philadelphia Association had temporarily forgotten that there was such an institution among the Baptists as the council.

The action of 1838 may have been the result of a sense of disappointment that the churches had not taken kindly to the well-intended effort at reform. The need of a solution of the problem was still felt, however, and the matter appears again in the Minutes of 1841. The Circular Letter of that year, in a paragraph on "The ordaining and licensing of ministers," in referring to certain abuses, remarks:

> "To restrain the evils arising from this source, and to promote harmony, it is very important that some general rule be acted upon, or if that cannot be, let each church and each minister more deeply feel the need of caution in a matter so important."

Further, the Association referred to a committee so much of the letter of the Spruce St. (Phil.) church as referred "to the very loose and unsatisfactory mode by which councils are formed for the ordination of ministers." This committee later in the session reported the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted:

> "*Resolved*, That it be recommended to the several churches in union with this body, to incorporate in their discipline, the following regulations:
>
> "'In all cases of licensing and ordaining ministers, and of constituting new churches, several neighboring churches shall be requested to appoint two or more delegates, who shall constitute a Council of advice and assistance.'
>
> "The Philadelphia Baptist Association shall annually appoint five ministering brethren, who shall be invited to attend on such occasions, and compose part of said Council."

It is to be noted that this was an attempt to secure greater uniformity; that it commended the council, which should include the representatives from the neighboring churches, although the Associational lines are not definitely suggested as the normal limits. The Association was to be recognized by the presence in the council of its committee, which, however, was not to sit from any *ex officio* right until invited to take a seat, when it would become an integral part of the council. Moreover, it is to be noted that this plan is to extend to cases of the constitution of new churches as well as the licensing and ordination of ministers.

It was not till the next year that the plan was really put into operation, a similar resolution being passed and a committee appointed. At the meeting in 1843, this committee reported that they had assisted in the constitution of three churches, had examined two men whom they had recommended for license, and had attended the ordination of one candidate. One member of the committee had assisted at another ordination. The report concludes,

> "Others, your committee learn, have, during the ecclesiastical year, been licensed by some of the churches, without complying with the recommendation of the Association.
>
> "In conclusion, your committee would recommend to the churches wishing to license or ordain candidates for the ministry to give at least two weeks' notice to the Associational Committee—and in no case to publish before calling the committee, that an ordination will take

> place on a specified day—your committee being of the opinion that on a previous day the candidate should be examined, and a sermon by him delivered, and then the arrangement be made for ordination on some future day."

The report of the committee was concurred in.

In 1844, the committee reported that they had heard three applications for licenses,

> * * * "but from the fact that churches and brethren have misapprehended the object of our appointment, and opposed it, we have found the fulfilment of our duty attended with more pain than pleasure.
>
> "But we are deely impressed with the importance of having some protection from an incautious sending forth of men unfit for the great work of the Gospel ministry."

So the second plan of the Philadelphia Association met a fate similar to that of the first, and in 1845, this second episode came to an end, when it was

> "*Resolved,* That this Association recommend most affectionately and earnestly to the churches composing this body, in no case to give license to persons to preach the Gospel without first asking, and if possible, securing the advice of at least three neighboring, and if practicable the most experienced aged ministers."

If this resolution is compared with that of 1837, it will be seen that it is even more mild in tone. The Philadelphia Association had failed to solve the problem, and was apparently content with failure.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES.

The real significance of the two plans adopted but soon abandoned by the Philadelphia Association was in the endeavor to use the Association as an intermediary between the individual council and the denomination at large for the special purpose of safeguarding the interests of the latter. The present writer has been unable to trace any definite historical development from these plans of the oldest Association, but the later attempts of various Associations to improve the efficiency of the council have, as a matter of fact, been along lines closely parallel to the Philadelphia plan of 1841, viz., the appointment of an advisory committee on councils, not, however, to sit in the council itself as representative of the Association, but to insure a competent council and to conserve the welfare of the larger sisterhood of churches. As the weakness of the council had been especially felt in its relation to the admission of candidates to the

ministry, it has sometimes been considered sufficient if the functions of an advisory committee have not extended beyond an oversight over ordination, though it is really the competency of the special local council which is in question.

We have just said that no definite connection of the later with the earlier plans appears; nor is it easy to trace the historical relation of the later plans to one another.[10] In the case of the plan of the Chicago Association, we have virtually a substitute for a Permanent Council, the effort to introduce the latter having been defeated. It seems better, however, to consider the Advisory Committee before turning to the Permanent Council, which we reserve for the next chapter. For our purpose in this study of the council as an institution, it will be sufficient to sketch briefly the history of two or three of the plans for Advisory Committees which are in use to-day, and which will show, in typical examples, how the effort is being made to use the Association in conjunction with the council for the protection of the denominational interests.

It was in 1891 that the plan of an associational ordination committee was first proposed to the Michigan Baptist State Convention. After a somewhat impassioned debate, the matter was tabled for a year; meanwhile, the opinion of the several Associations was to be ascertained. In 1892, it was found that sixteen out of twenty-one Associations had taken action; of these, six approved and one other endorsed the general purpose of the proposition, but nine disapproved, so for the time the matter was dropped. In 1896, however, the Saginaw Valley Association appointed an ordination committee and voted to ask the State Convention to advise the other Associations to take similar action. At its meeting in October of the same year, the State Convention unanimously adopted the proposal, which was confirmed by the ratification of the plan by most of the Associations. The Standing Resolutions, under which the Ordination Committees do their work, appear in the Minutes of the State Convention, together with an explanatory note, both of which are inserted here.

> "Section 1. This Association shall appoint a committee of five, before whom all candidates for the min-

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[10] Where a plan has been adopted through concerted action, as in Michigan, the historical connection can be traced. Yet here, when we try to trace the connection with earlier associational committees, we find it merely in the casual remark of a minister as he was passing through Detroit, that some associations in New York had an ordination committee. Cf. an article in "The Standard," March 11, 1905, by C. E. Conley, who in a letter to the present writer, says: "The remark gave me the suggestion, which I finally developed into the present 'usage' in Michigan."

istry are expected to appear for examination, prior to the call of a council for ordination.

"The said committee is to institute inquiry into the past history, moral character, religious life, literary and theological attainments, and general fitness of the candidate seeking ordination to the Christian ministry.

"Sec. 2. That we advise the churches composing this Association to make no arrangements for the ordination of any man, until after he has passed the preliminary examination of this committee, and received their recommendation for ordination.

"Sec. 3. That the church calling the formal council of ordination invite all other churches within the bounds of the Association to send delegates to sit with them in the council; that the invitation be issued at least three weeks before the date set for the meeting of the council, and that no delegates, nor churches, outside the Association, be invited to vote in said council.

"(The above resolution was so changed by the Kalamazoo River Association as to include knowledge of Systematic Theology among the points upon which the committee is to institute inquiry, and by St. Joseph Valley and Alpha Associations, so as to enable the church calling the council to invite churches beyond the bounds of the Association to send delegates empowered to vote. * * * (as), owing to the small number of churches composing the Associations, they might not otherwise be able to secure a proper representative council.)"

In 1898, the Long Island (N. Y.) Association, after having voted the previous year to table resolutions calling for the annual appointment of "a committee of nine, to be known as a Committee on Ordination," adopted, by a vote of 96 to 8, the following resolution, which was preceded by a preamble:

"*Resolved,* That the Moderator of the Association shall annually appoint a committee of nine brethren (six pastors and three laymen), to be known as "The Advisory Committee." It shall be the function of this committee to counsel with the churches or brethren connected with the Association who may purpose the calling of a council.

"Upon the invitation of the church or brethren, the Advisory Committee shall consider the occasion and investigate the circumstances. They shall then counsel

with reference to the wisdom and expediency of convening a council.

"If the proposed council be for the ordination of a brother to the work of the Gospel ministry, the Advisory Committee shall first carefully examine into the character, doctrinal convictions and ministerial gifts of the brother, and they shall advise both the candidate and the church with reference to the calling of the council.

"We recommend that the churches of the Association purposing the calling of councils shall first invite the consideration and advice of the Advisory Committee, and incorporate in the official call for the council the commendations of the Committee.

"The purpose of this resolution is not designed to preclude the privilege of any aggrieved brethren who may believe that they have just cause for the calling of an ex-parte council.

"Nor is it designed to contravene the privilege of any church or brethren appealing directly to the churches, according to Baptist custom."

It is at once evident that this is not essentially different from the Michigan plan, except that it recommends that the Committee be consulted in all cases when a church is considering the calling of a council, not merely for the preliminary examination of a candidate for ordination.

The functions of the Advisory Committee on Councils of the Chicago Association are practically the same as those of the same Committee in the Long Island Association. It was first appointed in 1900, upon the recommendation of a committee to which certain queries of the Centennial Church concerning councils had been referred. As already mentioned, the Advisory Committee in this Association is virtually a substitute for the Permanent or Annual Council, which had failed of adoption a few years earlier. In spite of the limitations upon the functions of this Committee, from its beginning it has been held in suspicion by some, and at the meeting of the Association in 1904, it was voted to ask the opinion of the churches as to its continuance.[11]

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[11] At the meeting of the Association in 1905, the report of the Advisory Committee on Councils was presented and adopted. Its statement as to its own status was as follows:

"Last year a resolution was adopted by the Association instructing the clerk to insert in the call for the meeting of 1905 the question whether this committee be continued. As a result of this appeal to the churches, 29 voted

It may be said that the advocates of the Advisory Committee quite generally express their satisfaction with the practical workings of the plan. Theoretically, it may seem a needless addition to our polity, to expect a church to ask advice on the question whether it should ask advice or not; yet the scheme does protect the churches from an undue multiplicity of councils and in the case of candidates for ordination, the preliminary examination may spare an unprepared candidate a more public embarrassment. Opposition to it has been based on a theory of rigid independency rather than upon any criticism of the actual working of the plan. Perhaps the severest criticism might come from those who approve of the purpose of the Advisory Committee, but believe that in the end it is wiser to handle the problem of the relation of the council to the denomination in a direct fashion, rather than by indirection. Moreover, some feel that the plan concentrates in a few individuals too great a restrictive power, and in case the Advisory Committee should be by a bare majority adverse to the calling of a council, the possibility of confusion is very evident. Even when, as in the Long Island Association, the plan explicitly reserves the privilege of any church to appeal directly to the churches, there would be uncertainty on the part of the

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for and 9 against its continuance. The vote was not large. We take it that the nine votes against it represent almost all if not all the active opposition. Of the remaining large number of churches not voting we conclude that they had not known enough of the work of the committee to pass judgment upon it. The work of the committee has not been conspicuous and we are not surprised that many of our people know nothing about it.

"From the first there has been opposition on the part of a few of the brethren. The opposition is based so far as we can discover on the supposition that its continuance jeopardizes the principles of Baptist independency. The committee has been in existence long enough to settle the question whether any of those principles which constitute the basis of our denominational life are endangered by its continuance. During its entire history of five years we have not known of a single specific instance in which its course has been criticised. It has never assumed any authority. It has confined itself to the giving of advice and this advice has been given only when asked for."

A resolution, "that the negative vote of a large minority of the churches, representing a membership of 3,398, with right on this floor to 71 votes, calls for a readjustment in the matter of the Advisory Committee on Councils. We therefore recommend that the churches refer to such matters, concerning which they may desire advice and counsel to the City Mission Board . . .," was presented with others by the Committee on Resolutions. It was not adopted, however, but "was referred to the Committee on Program, with instruction to find if possible a place on the program of either the afternoon or evening session when time could be given for considering the suggestion of the committee regarding the continuance of the Advisory Committee on Councils. The matter was not again brought up during the session of the Association."

church desiring to issue the call and on the part of the churches called. While the Chicago Association of course does not deny the right of direct appeal to the churches, it has recommended, through the adoption of the report by which the Advisory Committee was constituted,

> "That no council be called except upon the recommendation of this committee, and that the churches do not send delegates to any council within this Association unless the call have the approval of the advisory committee."

It is extremely unlikely, however, that any member of an Advisory Committee would oppose the calling of a council unless the reasons for opposition were sufficiently sound to convince the rest of the committee as well.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PERMANENT COUNCIL.

While other Associations have from time to time given expression to opinions concerning the council, and an examination of all their records would possibly reveal plans and suggestions fully as interesting as the schemes at which we have been looking, yet nothing appears of special or more than local significance till we come to the action of the Southern New York Baptist Association culminating in 1895. Two years previously, at the annual meeting of the Association, Rev. William C. Bitting, D. D., then pastor of the Mount Morris Baptist Church, had read a paper on "The State of Our Churches in New York City," and on Oct. 11, 1894, he read another paper on "Our Present Denominational Status," which was ordered printed in the Minutes, where it appears under the title, "The Status of Our Churches." After a somewhat detailed statistical analysis of the conditions of the churches, Dr. Bitting appealed to the Association to face frankly the situation and the problems which he had described and defined. "Let us be practical, definite, and united, and we will see new fruits." After a discussion, a committee of five, with Dr. Bitting as chairman, was appointed "to consider the condition of our denomination within the boundaries of this Association, and make such suggestions for its improvement as may seem to be best to them."

On Oct. 9, 1895, this committee reported at some length. In considering the relations of the churches to each other, it noted the following:

1. The lack of fraternal intercourse between our churches.
2. The want of cordial co-operation, mutual interest and helpfulness.
3. The need of systematic and thorough superintendence and cultivation of our field of operations. To sum up, it may be said that our churches are denominationally in a loose, disintegrated condition, neither in as close touch with adjacent population, nor with one another as they should be.

The report then emphasized the need of closer co-operation:

> "Our present weakness results in our opinion partly from a failure to perpetuate this essential principle of the New Testament in our associated life, and partly from our neglect to adapt ourselves to our changed environment. Besides a more rigorous adaptation of our work to the conditions of life which surround us, we need also to emphasize in our local denominational life this principle of oneness, which was so prominent and useful in the days of the apostles."

The committee then suggested a definite plan by which to secure the desired end, consisting of two features, with the first of which only are we especially concerned.

> "I. That there shall be a permanent Council.
>
> "1. It shall consist of every pastor, and one delegate from each church in the Association.
>
> "2. It shall maintain an organic relation to the Association.
>
> "3. Its functions shall be to consider all matters which are usually referred to special councils, such as:
>
> "a. The advisability of ordaining candidates,
>
> "b. The organization and location of churches,
>
> "c. Matters usually referred to mutual, or ex parte councils,
>
> "d. Or any other matter for which a church usually calls a council.
>
> "4. Its power shall be the same as that which councils usually have in our denomination, merely advisory, not legislative; moral, not judicial. Its opinion would virtually be that of our denomination in the city.
>
> "5. It shall hold regular meetings, at which it shall consider any matters brought before it by any church.
>
> "6. It shall have the right to request any church or churches to submit to it for advice thereon, any matters of local importance which affect the general denominational welfare or reputation.
>
> "7. It shall have the right to request brethren who contemplate the organization of a church, to submit to it a full statement of the conditions under which they propose to organize, and all information necessary as a basis for proper advice.
>
> "8. It shall have the power to act for the Association on such business as it would not be expedient to

postpone until the next annual meeting.

"9. It shall report to the Association at its annual session.

"10. The council shall organize itself, and in all respects in which its functions are not determined for it by the Association, shall define its own duties and privileges, without in any way interfering with the self-government of any local church, or violating well-established denominational usage."

The second feature suggested was the appointment of a Pastor at Large. His relation to the Permanent Council was to be as follows:

"He shall, so far as his work will allow: * * *

"5. Do such work as the Permanent Council may direct for the interest and development of our whole Brotherhood.

"6. He shall have no official relationship with any church, and shall receive no salary from any other source than that provided by the Permanent Council.

"7. He shall be, *ex officio,* a member of the Council and shall be accountable to it."

The report was received and discussed and finally adopted, the Association voting that a printed copy of the report be sent to each church in its membership, "with the request that each Church send its Pastor and one delegate to a Council to be held at a day to be hereafter fixed, to form a Permanent Council as proposed in the report." The following resolution was then adopted:

"*Resolved,* That we instruct the Clerk of the Association to issue a call to the Churches to send their Pastor and one delegate to meet in the Mount Morris Baptist Church on the first Tuesday in December at two o'clock p. m., for the purpose of forming a Permanent Council in accordance with the provisions of the report of the Denominational Committee, adopted at this meeting of the Association."

Before turning to the meeting thus called for the organization of the Permanent Council, it may be well for us to notice just what this new plan was in its relation to the previous development of the council. This is the more necessary for the main purpose of our study, as the idea of the Permanent Council was strenuously opposed not only by some within the Association in which the plan originated, but it created discussions in the denominational press, in

associational meetings and in various conferences in different parts of the country. Much of the opposition which it aroused doubtless came from the term, "Permanent," which suggested to some minds a status of the new body quite other than that actually defined by the plan adopted by the Association. In its membership, its power of self-organization, and its functions, the Permanent Council was to follow essentially the principles established in the conciliar system already operative in the denomination. The rights of the local church and its independency were most carefully guarded. Articles 1, 3, 4 and 10 contain nothing which can be assailed if one believes the ordinary council has any warrant for existence among Baptist churches; it is in terms of this institution that the Permanent Council and its functions are defined. There are three points, however, in which the plan for the Permanent Council differentiated it from the ordinary council: (1) Its organic relation to the Association; (2) Its permanency; (3) Its right to a limited initiative.

(1) ITS ORGANIC RELATION TO THE ASSOCIATION.

In its relation to the churches composing it, the relation of the Permanent Council was to be precisely that of the specially called council, except that there was to be the relation to the churches collectively in the Association as well as the direct relation of the two delegates to each individual church. This simply placed an additional check upon the new organization by linking its very existence to the Association which was itself based upon a purely voluntary relationship. It gave no new powers to the council; it might be considered an extension of the power of the Association, although really only the use, in a new direction, of the power already conferred upon the Association. The organic relation with the Association is only a concrete and practical method of following the principle noted earlier, that the associational unit offers itself most naturally in the correlation of the local church and the denomination. The report of the Permanent Council to the Association would give publicity to the actions of the former and would assist in the preservation of the Council's records. The provision that the Council might act for the Association in emergencies between the annual meetings of the latter body rests upon the fact that each body represents the same constituency.

(2) ITS PERMANENCY.

This feature, to which the Permanent Council owes its distinctive name, and which has caused most of the opposition to it, is really not so radical an innovation as the name might suggest, in the light of the actual development of the institution which we have been tracing—the conciliar system itself. It is the general consensus

of opinion among American Baptists that in certain situations advice should be sought from some sort of council. Although it has been customary to call a special council for each case, and that council has come into being only upon a special call, dissolving when it has finished its special work, the council as an institution may be considered established—that is, permanent. It exists as an institution in American Baptist polity even when no council happens to be in session. From their beginnings, the Associations have suggested more or less definite plans for the assistance of the churches in meeting the obligations of inter-church fellowship, their action being wholly dependent upon its acceptance by the churches. In this regard, there was nothing novel or radical in the action of the Southern New York Association.

It is certainly within the province of a church to appoint in advance delegates who shall represent the church at any councils in which the church may participate during the year, if it has the right to entrust other functions to trustees and committees. There is no more reason why the co-operation of the churches in the council should be sporadic any more than in the Association itself. Each is created by the churches and sustained by them; apart from them, neither has any existence.

The analogy of the development of the Permanent Council can be seen in the history of legislative committees. A special committee has been appointed for a special purpose. If a similar occasion recurs, again a special committee will be appointed. If, however, the matter becomes one of constant recurrence, needing frequent attention, economy, in the broadest sense of the term, demands that a standing committee be established. The Permanent Council, as established by the Association and the churches, was to be a standing committee of advice, as the ordinary council had been a special committee of advice. This does not mean that its membership would remain the same, thereby setting off individuals as a fixed class, nor does it mean that the committee is established forever. It does not mean that any final power is given to the council or taken from the individual church. In communities where there is only infrequent need of councils, and where the churches are sufficiently far apart that there will be little danger of their encroaching upon the rights of others, the specially called council may be satisfactory; yet such a situation is particularly favorable to unworthy men who wish to secure a ministerial standing. Where the churches are nearer, as in a metropolitan district, where each church may in a peculiar sense affect the entire denominational work of the community, a standing council of advice should be able to give that ad-

vice more intelligently and more consistently with the larger interests of the denomination and full as sympathetically with the local interests. Such in general were the reasons for the establishment of the Permanent Council by the Southern New York Baptist Association and most of the churches composing it.

(3) ITS RIGHT TO A LIMITED INITIATIVE.

Although this feature was early removed by the Council itself, as we shall see, it did belong to the original plan as adopted by the Association and so should be considered. The sixth and seventh articles gave to the Council certain rights of initiative, namely, the right to request churches to submit matters to the Council for advice, if in the judgment of the Council, the matters affected "the general denominational welfare or reputation"; and in the case of the contemplated organization of a church, the right to request "all information necessary as a basis for proper advice." As the expectation of the denomination that churches will submit such matters for advice has become virtually a moral demand, there appears very little power actually conferred upon the Permanent Council in the formal permission given in advance that it might take the initiative in asking churches to submit matters to it. The individual church would not be compelled to grant the request nor need it accept the advice of the Council. Yet the two articles seemed to make the Council rather than the church the judge of the question whether the church should seek advice, and so might needlessly offend the sense of independence in the local church.

Earlier in the meeting of the Association in 1895, a request for admission to its membership had been referred to the Committee on Application of Churches. After the plan for the Permanent Council had been adopted, this committee recommended that the application "be referred for further consideration to the new Permanent Council about to be formed," and it was so voted.

In accordance with the vote of the Association, its Clerk sent the call for the first meeting of the Permanent Council, sending to each church in the Association a printed letter containing the Resolution adopted by the Association; there was also sent a printed copy of the Report of the Committee suggesting the plan for the Council. Pursuant to this call, 39 churches sent delegates, consisting of 35 pastors and 28 laymen, who met in the Mt. Morris Church on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 1895, at 2 p. m. Eleven delegates appointed were not present. Temporary organization was effected by the election of Rev. W. H. P. Faunce as President, Rev. Samuel Alman as Clerk, and Rev. D. A. Murray as Assistant Clerk. After prayer, the call

for the Council was read and the roll of delegates called. The First Baptist Church definitely declined to accede to the request to participate in the Council. By vote, the temporary organization was made the "Permanent Council," and a committee appointed to bring before the Council a plan and scope of the Council's work.

Before considering any cases submitted to the Permanent Council, it may be better for us first to follow further the work of the Council in its own organization. At its first session, it passed these resolutions:

> "Resolved, that the Clerk of this Council communicate with the Churches that have neither sent delegates nor declined the call to this Council, informing them that the Council has convened, and of the strength of its representation, and invite them once more to join us.
>
> "Resolved, that this Council request its President and Clerk to prepare a response to the letter received from the First Baptist Church, and again invite them to join it."

The Committee on Plan and Scope did not report till the third session of the Council, on Feb. 4, 1896, when it reported the following, which was unanimously adopted:

DECLARATION.

> The Permanent Council of the Baptist churches of the City of New York and its vicinity had its origin in the request of the Southern New York Baptist Association to the churches represented in it to form such a council in accordance with the suggestion made at the Associational meeting in 1894.
>
> Its purpose is to bring these churches into closer association and co-operation without any encroachment upon the independence of any church, or interference with its right to self-government.
>
> Its functions are those usually discharged by councils, and to consider and act upon any matter referred to it by the Southern New York Baptist Association or of general concern to the denomination.
>
> It has the right to request information from any church represented in it upon any matters which affect the general denominational welfare, and to request those who contemplate the organization of a Church to submit a statement of the facts which induce them so to do. (This paragraph was repealed Nov. 9, 1897.)

It has the power to advise, but not to legislate or to enforce its conclusions.

CONSTITUTION.

Art. I. The name of the Council shall be "The Permanent Council of the Baptist Churches of the City of New York and its Vicinity."

Art. II. The objects, purposes and powers of the Council shall be as stated in the preceding Declaration.

Art. III. Its officers shall be a moderator, vice-moderator, recording clerk, corresponding clerk and treasurer.

Art. IV. Each Church connected with the Southern New York Baptist Association may send annually, in the month of November, its pastor or its associate or assistant pastor, and one member as delegates to the Council, and the delegates thus sent shall constitute the Council. The terms of the delegates shall expire with the election of their successors.

Art. V. Regular meetings shall be held on the first Tuesday of each month at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, unless, by resolution, the Council shall order otherwise. The meeting in November shall be the annual meeting, and the officers of the Council shall be elected.

Special meetings may be called by the Moderator, and shall be called upon the written request of any seven members of the Council. Twenty members shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

Art. VI. The foregoing Declaration may be amended at any annual meeting, and this Constitution may be amended at any regular business meeting by a vote of two-thirds of the members present, provided that at least thirty members shall be present, and a previous notice of the proposed amendment shall have been given at a regular meeting.

BY-LAWS.

Art. I. (This, in five sections, defines the duties of the five officers in the usual way. There is need of inserting here only the requirement that the Corresponding Clerk "shall send notices to the delegates of the time and place of holding all meetings of the Council.")

Art. II. Order of Business.

1. Prayer.
2. Calling of Roll.
3. Reading of Minutes.
4. Report of Treasurer.
5. Report of Corresponding Clerk.
6. Report of Committees.
7. Unfinished Business.
8. New Business.
9. Adjournment.

Art. III. These By-Laws may be amended at any regular business meeting by a vote of the members present, provided that at least 30 members shall be present and a previous notice of the proposed amendment shall have been given at a regular meeting.

At the same meeting in which the Constitution and By-Laws were adopted, it was also voted that each Church represented in the Council should be requested to contribute towards the expenses of the Council a sum of money equal to one-half cent for each member reported to the Association at its last meeting.

At the annual meeting of the Council, on Nov. 9, 1897, the fourth paragraph of the Declaration was stricken out for the reasons indicated. (Page 101.) At the same meeting, an amendment to the Constitution was offered, which was adopted on March 1, 1898.

> "A Report shall be made to the Southern New York Baptist Association at each annual session of the action of the Council upon all applications for advice (a) from the churches, concerning ordinations to the ministry, and (b) from the brethren seeking recognition as a Baptist Church. Such reports shall be made for purpose of information and record and not for review by the Association."

This amendment simply incorporated into the Constitution the provision of the ninth article of the original plan as adopted by the Association, with a more definite statement of the purpose of the report to that body. At this meeting on March 1st, it was

> "Resolved, that a strict interpretation of Art. IV. of the Constitution limits membership in this Council to churches that are members of the Southern New York Baptist Association."

On several occasions, however, especially during the examination of candidates for ordination, visiting brethren have been invited to participate in the deliberations of the Council, in accordance with the well-established usage in councils, but presumably with no power to vote. In October, 1899, the time for the regular meeting of the Council was changed to the third Monday of the month, but otherwise no further changes have been made in the Constitution and By-Laws. On one occasion, March 7, 1899, when a storm prevented the attendance of a full quorum at the regular meeting of the Council, by special vote of those present, the examination of a candidate for ordination was proceeded with. While theoretical objections might be raised to such procedure, none seems to have been. As the action of the Council was not final but was subject to the ratification of the Church asking the examination of the candidate, the members present, though less than a quorum, felt justified in proceeding. On May 26, 1902, the Council ratified the action of the two previous meetings, at which no quorum was present.

Although in this study of the council as an institution we have not paid any specific attention to the method of procedure in the ordinary council nor examined definite cases and the action of councils except as this would throw light upon the external relations of the council, it may be well to notice some of the advantages which have been discerned in the Permanent Council in the handling of specific cases brought before it.

In cases of request for the recognition of churches, from its relation to the Association, the Council has been able to take a view of the whole field and the relation of the new enterprise to existing interests. While distinct from the Association, in a sense it is a large committee of the Association, which will generally adopt the Council's opinion as its own; yet on the question of admitting the new church to its membership, the Association has the right to review the whole situation.

In the examination of candidates for ordination, the Permanent Council is not handicapped by a definite "terminus ad quem" for its deliberations. The time for the ordination services cannot be set very definitely until the Council has acted. Having regular meetings, the postponement of action or the continuation of the examination to a later session is a much less complicated and embarrassing affair than the adjournment of a special council to a later day. In the very first case of examination which came before the Permanent Council, it seemed advisable to continue the examination over to the next regular session, an arrangement which was readily acquiesced in by the candidate and the church immediately concerned.

While in no sense compelling absolute conformity to any plan which it may suggest to the churches or which it may adopt for its own guidance, the Permanent Council has been able to bring to the attention of the churches certain principles of action and to make some improvements in the methods of conducting the business of a council. In 1897, for example, it adopted the report of a Committee on Polity, which advised the churches, among other things, to pay prompt attention to requests for letters of dismission, and that Baptists generally unite with the nearest Baptist Church, if they live at a distance from their own. Of more general interest is the effort of the Permanent Council to secure a more satisfactory examination of candidates for ordination. In 1903, a committee was appointed to suggest a Course of Examination in the English Bible; the committee sent queries to various theological teachers and others to ascertain their opinion upon such an examination and their recommendations as to its general scope. At the meeting of the Council on Dec. 21, 1903, the Committee reported the following plan, which was adopted and ordered sent to the Baptist journals and theological seminaries of the country:

> I. That examination of a candidate be upon (1) his Christian experience; (2) his call to the Christian ministry; (3) his knowledge of the English Bible; (4) his views of Christian truth.
>
> II. That in the examination on the English Bible no difference as to scope be made between graduates of theological seminaries and those who have not had such advantages, since some knowledge of the Bible is essential to qualify any person for entrance upon the Christian ministry. The Council can easily adjust the minuteness of its examination to the educational history of each candidate.
>
> III. That as a minimum, the scope of the examination on the English Bible embrace (1) the names and classification of the books of the Bible; (2) the contents of any book in the Bible; (3) Bible history, including principal biographies; (4) the life of Christ.

The question of the method of conducting was then raised, and the matter referred to the same committee.

Although in the original plan for the Permanent Council, its functions were to include the consideration of "all matters which are usually referred to special councils, such as * * * c. Matters usually referred to mutual or *ex parte* councils," and in its Declaration, it was stated that "its functions are those usually discharged

by councils," from the beginning the Permanent Council has studiously avoided becoming an *ex parte* council and his considered no matter brought before it by a minority of a church or excluded members of a church. In such cases, it has been possible either to secure the consent of the church concerned that the Council consider the case, making it virtually a mutual council, or the minority or excluded members have asked to be received into some other church, which thereupon has brought the matter before the Council for its advice.

Since the adoption of the amendment to the Constitution providing that the Council shall report to the Association, such reports have been made and are embodied in the Minutes of the latter body.

It was natural that the organization of a Permanent Council in so prominent a body as the Southern New York Association should be followed by the introduction of similar institutions in other Associations, or at least, that the suggestion to organize them should be made. In 1896, the Chicago Association, which the previous year had expressed itself in one particular concerning the rights of councils,[1] adopted the report of its Committee on Resolutions, which had presented a resolution calling for a conference of the churches, through delegates, to consider the advisability of the organization of "a Baptist Council to continue its life throughout the associational year." The meeting was held on March 16, 1897, and passed the following resolution:

> "*Resolved,* That this body advise the churches to appoint their pastors and two delegates each, to organize a Baptist Council to continue through the Associational year to perform such duties as belong to ordaining, recognizing and advisory councils in the Baptist denomination, whenever requested by any church desiring such advice, so to do. We, however, further advise that the delegates do not organize unless two-thirds of the churches responding do so favorably."

This action of the Conference was reported to the Association at its meeting in September, 1897, and the above resolution was adopted as a part of a report of the committee on the Conference, which had already been accepted. A committee of three was appointed to carry out the findings of the Conference. At the next meeting of the Association, in 1898, the Clerk announced that 31 churches had reported on the question, 19 being favorable and 12 unfavorable toward the organization of the proposed council. The Association extended the time during which the answers of the

1. See Chap. V., Note 23.

churches might be received until Nov. 1, but at that date the necessary two-thirds was still wanting, so the Annual Council failed of adoption by the Chicago Association. The opponents of the plan made use of a two-fold argument to secure its defeat,—that it was an innovation which rested upon no New Testament precedent, and that it imperiled the independence of the churches. The Association was not satisfied, however, with the situation; there were obvious defects and even perils in a system which allowed packed councils and hasty decisions of vital questions, and very soon, as we noted in the previous chapter, the Chicago Association appointed an Advisory Committee on Councils which could represent the Association in oversight over the cases to be submitted to specially called councils.

In New Jersey, several Associations have organized Permanent Councils, and the Worcester (Mass.) Association is about to organize one; the matter has been submitted to the churches and a sufficient number of them have voted their approval to insure the adoption of the plan. All these generally follow closely the Southern New York order, the chief deviations being found in the North New Jersey Association, which in 1900 organized an "Associational Council." This Association repudiates the idea of "permanency" not only by using another term in the name of its Council; the Standing Rule under which the Council is organized and operated definitely states:

> "That an Associational Council shall be formed each year, to which may be referred all matters usually referred to Councils by Baptist churches. This Council shall be composed of the pastor and two laymen from each church in the Association, who shall come together for organization at each annual meeting of the Association at the call of the Secretary of the Associational Council."

This Associational Council has no stated meetings except this one for organization, meeting in council only when called together at the request of some church. By a rule of the Council,

> "all questions which are usually referred to a Council shall first be presented to the Advisory Committee of this Council, through its Secretary, * * * and if in their judgment it be wise to call this council together to consider the matter, they shall advise the church to call the Associational Council to meet with it for the transaction of such business as shall come before them."

Presumably, though it is not clear from the language of the rule, an adverse judgment of this committee, which is composed of eight laymen and four ministers, precludes any church of the Association from securing a meeting of the Associational Council.[2]

2. This seems implied in a statement of the function of the Advisory Committee and the status of the Associational Council made by the Secretary, Mr. Wm. A. May, in a recent letter to the present writer. "This Committee is merely a safeguard. It has no power except to advise, and if a full council is to be called, it is done by the Secretary *in the name of and by authority of the calling church expressly given for the occasion.* Thus is preserved the dignity, independence and authority of the local church, which must, however, in requesting the Committee to act, embody in its request a stipulation agreeing to abide by the decision of the Committee and of the Council if called." This last statement reveals a remarkable demand made by the Council and acquiesced in by the churches. In view of the practical harmlessness of the term "permanent," as applied to such an organized council as that of the Southern N. Y. Association, it looks as if the North New Jersey Association had strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

In this study of the council as an institution among American Baptists, we have traced its development to its latest phases and may now briefly review the ground over which we have been passing. Finding the occasion for the council in the relations existing between independent churches of the same order, we saw no need of tracing back the line of historic development behind the time when the idea of the local church was, so to speak, rediscovered, in the Protestant Reformation. We might have begun our study of the council among American Baptists with the time when the first council was held by them; but finding the principle of the obligations of fellowship involved in the genesis of the council, we inquired first as to the theories of inter-church fellowship which were held by the early Baptists of England. For as many English Baptists came to this country and the early American Baptists were in constant communication with their English brethren, the American Baptist churches would inevitably be influenced by the doctrine and polity of the Baptists of England. Examining a historic line of Confessions of Faith, we saw that alongside of the principle of the independence of the local church and its direct responsibility to Christ, there was also recognized the obligation of fellowship. In the practice, also, of the English Baptist churches, we saw the recognition of the same principle, the matter of the setting apart of a ministry in particular being considered of wider concern than the mere limits of a single local church. Turning to America, we found here the same ideas finding expression as the increasing number of churches brought them into more frequent touch one with another.

The Congregational churches of New England had found themselves confronted by the problems of inter-church relations before the Baptist churches were numerous enough for such questions to arise. They had already held several councils before the first Baptist council was held, and it is probable that the Baptists did not ignore the lessons which their Congregational brethren had been learning by experience. Yet we are hardly warranted in saying that the American Baptists borrowed the council from the Congregationalists, for many of them had been somewhat familiar with it as employed by the English Baptists. With the increasing number of

churches after the Great Awakening, the American Baptists found the problems of inter-church fellowship more pressing and in the meetings of their Associations, as these problems were discussed, the place of the council became more definitely recognized. While the Associations themselves were advisory bodies, it was probably the fear that they might become too powerful, thus threatening the independence of the local churches, which led them to foster the council and to preserve it and even to develop it as an institution, rather than to have assumed its functions, thus virtually destroying it by making it superfluous. It is in the process of the differentiation of the council from the Association that we have been best able to trace the development of the council; for in this process, rather than in the various functions which have been carried on by councils, is the real history of the council as an institution of the American Baptists to be discovered.

Of special significance, therefore, are the more recent phases of the council's development; not that they are intrinsically such innovations as they have seemed to many, but because they are direct and avowed attempts to correlate the local council with the denomination at large through the medium of the Association. If the sphere of the council has been enlarged, it has been because the denominational growth has increased the community of interests and many of the contingencies of inter-church relations formerly remote are now pressing upon the churches. As the council has from the beginning been dominated by the practical ends which it has been intended to serve, so in the various expedients for Associational oversight, the effort has been made to meet and solve certain of the practical problems of denominational life.

There are two tendencies discernible in the polity of the various branches of the Christian Church to-day. In those denominations which emphasize catholicity and a highly centralized ecclesiasticism, there are forces at work disintegrating in their effect upon a rigid uniformity and continually asserting the rights of a local and individual expression of religious life. This is a fruit of the democratic spirit of the age. On the other hand, those churches which have emphasized the individual and the local group of believers, show a marked tendency toward closer organization and a more complete recognition of obligations to the larger fellowship. It does not follow that the movements will continue till the two divisions have exchanged their theories of ecclesiastical polity, nor may we expect that eventually the two theories will be completely synthesized. There will always be those who will magnify the universal, while others will always be particularists. In each division there will be extremists, who doubtless will from time to time teach the Church

useful lessons; yet it is certain that any great advance of the Christian Church toward a fundamental and organic unity will not follow the extremists either on the one side or the other.

To a person reared in a highly organized and centralized ecclesiasticism, the council as it exists in American Baptist polity doubtless seems a feeble instrument; advice is proverbially cheap, and a body which has only the function of giving advice is essentially insignificant and at the most, harmless. On the other hand, the person reared in a rigid independency is ever suspicious of the council, fearing its development into a tyranny. To substitute the advisory council for the legislative and disciplinary bodies of the more centralized denominations would doubtless result in chaos, if it should be done precipitously. If the Baptist churches of America should become oligarchical and should lose the spirit of democracy, there would be a lurking danger in even an advisory council. There is not the slightest suspicion, however, that any of the development in the council as an institution among the American Baptists has its origin in any disloyalty to the democratic spirit within the church. It has come rather from a sense of the great need of showing to the critics of Independency, that the democratic spirit is capable of producing as efficient an organization of Christian forces as is any official oligarchy or spiritual aristocracy.

The Baptists in America started as particularists and emphasized the independence of the local church, yet they recognized very distinctly the obligations of fellowship. There came to be, however, a tradition of an independency much more rigid than the actual facts of history bear out, and that tradition has been too much exploited for the best good of the cause of Christ. Some of the manuals of church polity which have been widely used in the denomination may be held to a considerable degree responsible for the authority of the tradition. Yet the great onward movement of the Baptists has not been permanently hindered, for when the traditions conflicted with the call of duty as embodied in the obligations of Christian fellowship, whether among individual Christians or among the churches, the Gospel principle has ultimately triumphed. The chief significance of this genetic study of the council is to be found in the light it may throw upon the efforts of Independency, as represented in the American Baptists, to attain a more perfect efficiency.

APPENDIX.

The lists that follow make no claim to completeness, but are inserted for whatever of service they may be. The writer will be glad to receive data concerning councils not included in these lists, and also any corrections that may be made by those having more direct access to the records of the churches calling the councils than has been possible to him.

A (?) following a date indicates that the council may have been held the year previous to the date given; following the name of the place it indicates some doubt as to whether there was a fully organized council representing other churches. In some cases, the location of the church calling the council is given rather than the place where the council was held. Where the name of the State is not given, look above in the list.

A. A Partial List of Councils up to 1820.

1712—Middletown, N. J.
1712—Cape May Court House.
1718—Boston, Mass. (First.)
1738—Boston. (First.)
1740—Springfield.
1743—Boston. (Second.)
1748—Waterford, Conn.
1753—Middleboro, Mass.
Exeter. R. I.
1754—Exeter.
1757—Exeter. (2.)
1764—Boston, Mass. (First.)
1765—Amenia, N. Y.
1767—Grafton, Mass.
1770—West Royalston.
1772—Sanford, Me.
1774—Thompson, Conn.
1775—West Greenwich, R. I.
1776—(?)Bellingham, Mass.
Medfield.
1780—Newton, Mass.
Gilmanton, N. H.
Wells, Me.
1781—South Kingstown, R. I.
Manchester, Vt. (?)
1782—Pownal, Vt.
1783—Dighton, Mass.
1785—(?)Sutton.
1785—Hoosick, N. Y.
West Bridgewater, Mass.
Wilmington, Del.
1788—Sandisfield, Mass.
New London, N. H.
Woodstock, Conn.
1788(?)—Ashfield, Mass.
1789—New London, N. H.
Weston, Mass.
Norwich Plains, Conn.
Roxborough, Pa.
1790—Sandisfield, Mass.
Norwich Plains, Conn.
Woodstock.
Hartford. (First.)
1792—Marshfield, Mass.
Stamford, Conn.
East Cornwall.
1793—Marshfield, Mass.
Morris, N. Y.
1795—Clifton Park, N. Y.
Troy.

1795—Venice.
Wallingford, Vt.
1796—North Berwick, Me.
Stephentown, N. Y.
1797—Thompson, Conn.
1798—Thompson.
1799—Warwick, Mass.
South New Berlin, N. Y.
1800—Exeter, N. H.
Grafton, Mass.
Norwich, Conn.
Norwich.
1801—Abbott's Corner, Quebec.
Portland, Me.
Wallingford, Vt.
Charlestown, Mass.
Cazenovia, N. Y.
Cortland.
Homer.
1802—West Royalston, Mass.
Barnstable.
Cromwell, Conn.
1803—Grafton, Vt.
Wallingford, Vt.
Rupert.
Beverly, Mass.
Somerset.
West Royalston.
Butternuts, N. Y.
Covert.
1804—Millis Mem., Troy, N. Y.
Wallingford, Vt.
New London, Conn.
1805—Sedgwick, Me.
Salem, Mass. (First.)
Suffield, Conn. (Second.)
Butternuts, N. Y.
Covert.
Lansingburgh.
Stillwater.
1806—Greenfield, N. Y.
Ovid. (2.)
Grafton, Vt.
North Springfield.
Swanzey, N. H.
1807—Boston, Mass. (First.)
Hartford, Conn.
Galway, N. Y.
Stillwater.
1808—Gilmanton, N. H.
North Springfield, Vt.
Barnstable, Mass.
Bernardston.
Mansfield, Conn.
Bennettsburg, N. Y.
Acworth, N. H.
Somerset, Mass.
North Hector, N. Y.
Truxton.
1810—Bath, Me.
Burrillville, R. I.
Salon, N. Y.
Spencer.
1811—Essex, Conn.
Hartford.
Suffield.
Albany, N. Y.
1812—Buckstown, Me.
Cheshire, Vt.
Covert, N. Y.
1813—Canaan, N. H.
1814—Canton, Mass.
Sharon.
1814—Webster, Mass.
1815—Methuen, Mass.
Webster.
Cortland, N. Y.
1816—New Haven, Conn.
Bennettsburg, N. Y.
1817—Alfred, Me.
Enfield, N. Y.
Forestville.
1818—North Hector, N. Y.
Brookfield, Mass.
Newburyport, Mass.
1819—Taunton, Mass.
Leverett and Montague.
Thompson, Conn.
Farmer Village, N. Y.
Ulysses.
1820—Forestville, N. Y.

B. Councils for the Ordination of Deacons.

1803—Wallingford, Vt.
1806—Weathersfield.
Ovid, N. Y.
1815—Cortland, N. Y.
1817—Ovid. (Council called, but no record that it was held.)
1822(?)—North Hector.
1822—Danby (Ithaca) N. Y.
Ovid.
1823—Manchester, Vt.
Sandisfield, Mass.
1827—Townsend, Mass.
1828—Groton, Conn.
1832—Ovid, N. Y.
1833—Fitchburg, Mass.
1848—Mecklenburg, N. Y.
1859—Ovid.
1860—Mecklenburg.
1862—Ovid.
1876—Bennettsburg, N. Y.

Dissertations Wm H. Allison
Baptist Councils Am.

NAME	DATE	NAME	DATE
R. Sturgis	FEB 6 1940		